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THE INVISIBLE

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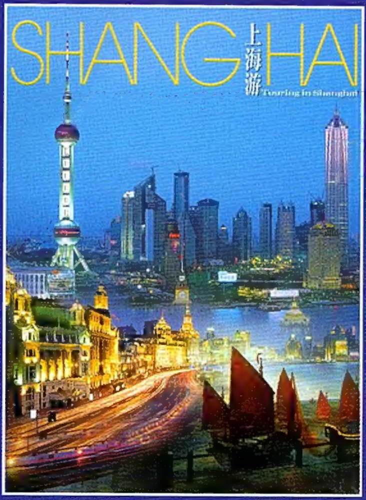
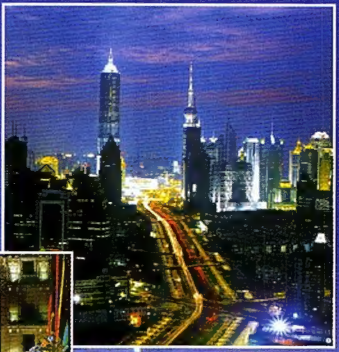


Shanghai has evolved at an unprecedented speed for decades into the biggest commercial city in China and one of the great metropolises of the world. Favourably located at the mouth of the Yangtse River, Shanghai has a long history and a rich culture. Commercial tower blocks and traditional buildings exude their individual charms simultaneously in the Pudong District, where hundreds of buildings in different styles, old or new, are collectively known as the Exposition of World Architecture. A kaleidoscope of entertainments and festivals of Old Shanghai attracts scores of entrepreneurs and travellers alike. "Touring in Shanghai" takes you deeper into this vibrant city through spectacular photography, along with outlines for more than 10 different kinds of tours including a shopping tour, popular tourist sights, cultural excursions, and more. Practical information summarises accommodations, transport and dining options, and tourist maps are also included. "Touring in Shanghai" is the latest, most comprehensive travel pictorial of Shanghai available in Hong Kong.



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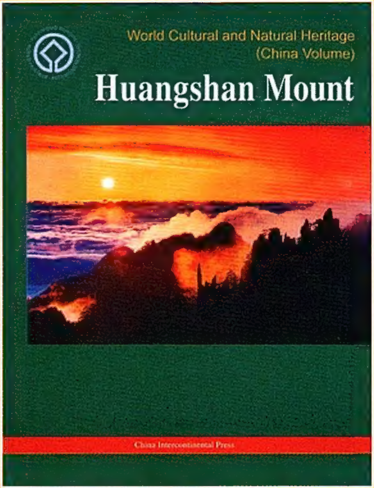
Mt. Huangshan, situated in the south of Anhui Province, is one of the most famous scenic areas in China. Being put into the World Heritage List, it is also granted with two laurels of cultural heritage and natural heritage by the UNESCO's World Heritage Commission.

The landscape of the mountain is a typical granite hoodoo landform shaped during the long geological periods by several tectonic movements in the crust. Mt. Huangshan has long been famous for its strange-looking pine trees, grotesque rocks, sea of clouds and hot springs.

All over one thousand metres above sea level, there are 77 peaks in the scenic area of almost two hundred square kilometres. Granite rock forests and rock columns together with massive rocks scatter everywhere. Moreover, Mt. Huangshan is a diverse ecosystem with a treasure of wildlife. There are approximately 1450 species of plants, 300 species of vertebrates and 170 species of birds.

Combined unique scenery and magnificent sea of clouds, the beauty of Mt. Huangshan has continued to fascinate endless visitors. Catch a glimpse of its glory in this "Huangshan Mount" pictorial that is filled with breath-taking images taken by our team of photographers!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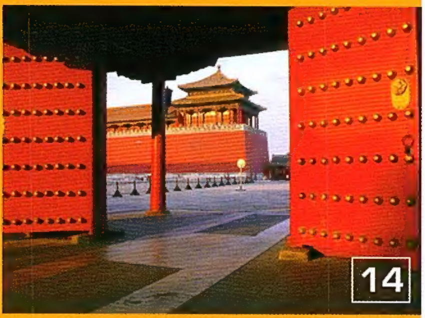

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The Invisible Forbidden City

Photos & Article by Li Shaobai

The Forbidden City is not only the exclusive and best-preserved imperial palace left in China, but also the largest in the world. The whole palace of nearly 100 courts and over 9000 houses was meticulously built, intended to awe people with its grand atmosphere. Inside this palace, visitors can savour the glamorous history and cultural heritage of China.

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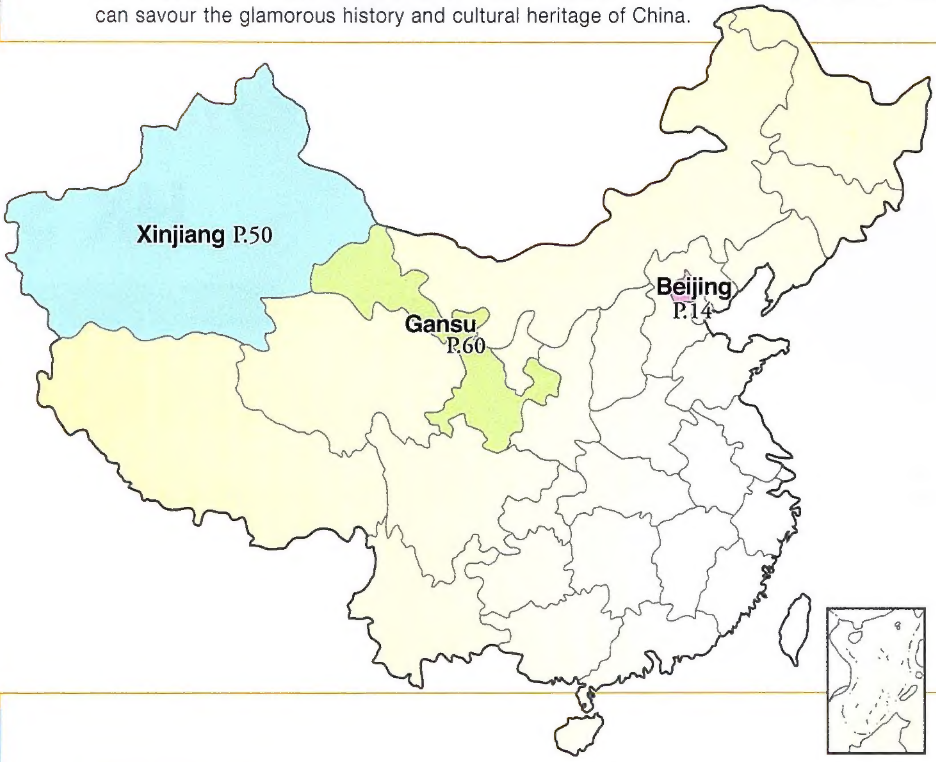

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The Sorrowful Season of Cotton-Picking

Photos & Article by Shi Baoxiu

In order to make a living, hundred of thousands of women from Gansu, Shaanxi, Henan, Sichuan and other provinces would leave their homes in summer, to pick cotton in Tianshan Mountains of Xinjiang, the northwest border area of China.

60 Photography

Fantastic Danxia Landform in Zhangye

Photos & Article by Zheng Fuxin

An amateur photographer in Gansu Province accidentally chanced upon a rare natural Danxia landform site. The new discovery has soon attracted the interest of travellers.

English Edition

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The Small Town by the Grand Canal: Nanyang

Photos & Article by Wang Bin

Nanyang Town was once a prosperous business centre since the construction of the Grand Canal 700 years ago, but today's Nanyang has returned to peace and quietness from the bustling trade.

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A Fairyland on Mountains: Ninu Village

Photos & Article by Cao Guozhong

The village of Ninu is located in the valley between the Dividing Range of Yunnan Province and Daocheng of Sichuan Province. This Tibetan village is buried deep in the mountains and it can only be accessed on horseback or by foot.

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The bronze lion
(by Li Shaobai)

74 Photo Album

The Bicycle Kingdom

Photos by Wang Wenlan *Article by Xiao Fuxing*

Bicylce was invented in Scotland, but it has seen its greatest use in China. It is probably, apart from chopsticks, the most popular item in the country. Whether in the most modern city or in the remotest village, bicycle is omnipresent.

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China Tourism

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No.289 Aug/Sept 2004

The wall of the Forbidden City (by Li Shaobai)

FROM THE EDITOR

The Tales behind the Forbidden City

Attracted over seven million visitors annually, the Forbidden City (or Palace Museum) captures the essence of feudal empires and it represents the highest achievement in ancient Chinese architecture and engineering.

Yet, there are many tales hidden behind the massive and solemn structure. This month's feature story is offering you a glimpse of the imperial life, and stories that we believe every tourist should hear before making a visit. It is customary that people react with awe when visiting such majestic buildings, but only by knowing what went on inside the place can people perceive the full picture in detail.

Even though the feudal society has long been transformed and modernised, it was not always so corrupted. In the rare time such as the beginning of the Qing Dynasty (1616), China had a few diligent and brilliant emperors who brought the country to the higher scenario. Most unfortunately, the feudal system could rarely maintain the quality of its leader. The succeeding emperors of the Qing Dynasty were mediocre at best, if not downright inadequate and shamelessly promiscuous. We will uncover the life of these emperors and recap the decline of the last dynasty for you. Happy reading!

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Aug/Sept

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Beijing (China Millennium Mounment)

The **Exhibition of Genghis Khan Ancient Nomadic Culture of Northern China** is a feast of cultural relics of grassland civilisation. More than three hundred artifacts and ornaments are gathered together, including the sophisticated weapons of Genghis Khan and his clansmen, as well as the exquisitely decorated items of Huns and Turks. Some exhibits dated back to 800 B.C. and visitors are allowed to touch the replica of some exhibits, such as the imperial Mongolian tent, the warrior cart of Khan, and the ancient stone-throwing machine. Ticket price: ¥30.

Sept 13

Qingyang County, Anhui Province

As a Buddhist sanctuary and a national scenic resort, Mount Jiuhua is a Mecca for both tourists and pilgrims from around the world. This is particularly so on the birthday of Boddhisattva, which later became the **Jiuhua Temple Fair**. Monks and pilgrims congregate at the Pagoda of the Holy Body are to stand vigil for the Bodhisattva; moreover, commodity fairs are also arranged.

Sept 9

Lugu Lake, the border of Sichuan and Yunnan provinces

The **Zhuanshan** (Turning-around the Mountain) **Festival** is the traditional celebration of the matriarchal Mosuo people. Mosuo people are marriage-free, and the children here grow up with and inherit their surname from their mother. During the festival, they would dress their best to worship the Gemu (Lion) Goddess Mountain and pray for the Goddess' protection. It is also a time for horse racing, wrestling and courting.

Sept 18

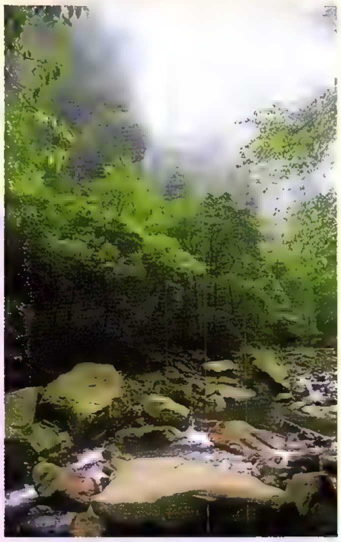
Shanghai

Shanghai Tourism Festival is a large-scale metropolitan tourist festivity. Every year, the opening ceremony of the Tourism Festival takes the form of a grand-scale parade of floats and performance troupes. The 2003 Tourism Festival attracted around 8 million citizens and tourists.

Sept 10-15

Zhenzhou, Henan Province

The Shaolin martial arts style dates back to the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and reached its peak in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Gradually, the martial arts of Shaolin Temple spread among the people. In 1991, the first **Zhenzhou Shaolin International Martial Arts Festival** was held to carry forward the heritage of Chinese martial arts and promote local tourist.



Sept 18

Zhangjiajie, Hunan Province

Zhangjiajie is the first national forest park established in China, with over 97% of forest cover. The Wulingyuan district in the reserve is home to a good variety of rare and precious animals. During the **Zhangjiajie International Forest Festival**, tourists may join the Tujia people to raft on the Maoyan River and to take part in an international mountaineering and rock climbing invitational.

Sept

Xi'an, Shanxi Province

Xi'an was one of the most important cradles of Chinese civilisation. For over a millennium from the Second Century BC, China's silk was transported from Xi'an to central Asia and Europe. The city served as the first capital of a unified China and capital of 11 dynasties. Although damaged by several wars, Xi'an still contains a host of historical sites. The **Xi'an Ancient Culture Art Festival** will host a large-scale art performance, some exhibitions of traditional culture and trade fairs.

Sept 20-25

Suzhou, Jiangsu Province

The silk embroidery from Suzhou is renowned throughout China. The fineness of the silk threads used, the merging shades of the colours, and the reversible pictures and screens, are always associated with Suzhou embroidery. During the **Suzhou Silk Tourist Festival**, silk garments exhibitions, trade talks, and various recreational performances are arranged.

A Relentless Battle to Save Dunhuang

The East Gate of Dunhuang

Chinese scientists have been fighting against nature and man to protect the renowned frescos at Dunhuang grottoes from damages in the tough climate of northwest China. The Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang city were included in the world cultural heritage list of the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organisation in 1987.

The grottoes are also known as the "Caves of the Thousand Buddhas" and they are one of the world's most vital sites of ancient Buddhist culture. They contain some 2,000 clay sculptures and more than 45,000 m of mural paintings that date back from the 5th to the 14th centuries.

Of the 735 caves, about 492 still remained intact. They all have been subjected to various kinds of damage to some extent. In addition to the erosions of wind and sand, experts say damages to the grottoes have also stemmed from the modern perils of mass tourism, where the moisture from the breath of visiting crowds can impair delicate murals that have survived for centuries in an arid desert climate. Nearly 4 million tourists from more than 80 countries and regions have visited the grottoes since the first one was opened to visitors in 1979. The 50 grottoes that open to tourists today are receiving more than 300,000 people a year, a figure that is expected to climb to 500,000 in the coming five to ten years.

To minimize damage to the grottoes, Dunhuang Research Institute diverted the tourists to eight different routes in 2000. Last year, the organisation requested tourists to make reservations beforehand in an effort to adjust visitors' flows. China started to protect the grottoes from wind and sand in 1944. According to the Dunhuang Research Institute, sand that accumulates in the grottoes today is less than 10% of what was reported in the 1980s.

In the meantime, scientists are working on a virtual caves project, which will allow viewers, without entering the grottoes, to feel like they are visiting the real grottoes of amazing Buddhist art.

Yong Mausoleum to Apply for World Culture Heritage

Xinbin Man Autonomous County, Liaoning Province, is making full preparations as the Yong Mausoleum applies for the world culture heritage.

The Yong Mausoleum in the Qing Dynasty is an ancient tomb for the family of Ai'xinjueluo, the royalty of the Qing Dynasty. The mausoleum, together with the Fu Mausoleum and the Zhao Mausoleum, applied for the world culture heritage three years ago.

During this period, Xinbin Man Autonomous County has spent half a year to make a plan about the Yong Mausoleum protection. In order to settle the archives and culture relics well, the county carried out a wide investigation and collected over 600 pieces of video and audio information. In addition, the government invested one million yuan (~US $125,000) to repair the mausoleum and turned it into its original outlook.

Yong Mausoleum, Xinbin Man Autonomous County, Liaoning Province

World Heritage Sites for Cash

Pingyao of north China Shanxi Province used to be an unknown place, but the year 1997 became a milestone for the tiny town, when it was made a World Heritage site by the UNESCO. Its ticket sales topped 5 million yuan (~US $600,000) in 1998, compared with about US $20,000 in the previous year.

In China, the richest World Heritage place is Lijiang, an ancient town in Yunnan Province, southwest China. In 2000, it earned over US $160 million from tourism and relevant industries. The eminent financial results turned out by these World Heritage sites are eye-catching and have encouraged many others to follow suit.

Seeking World Heritage Listing of "Butterfly Lovers"

China will seek the listing of its centuries-old folklore story "The Butterfly Lovers" as non-material world heritage, with a formal application expected to be submitted to UNESCO in 2006.

The most popular love story in China, the "Butterfly Lovers" tells the legend of two 4th century Chinese lovers who could not get married due to different family backgrounds and turned into a butterfly couple after their death. The story was also called "China's Romeo and Juliet". For centuries, the story has been adapted into traditional operas, movies and TV plays. A modern concerto adapted from the story has now become a music classic repeatedly played by world-class masters.

Invitation to a Nice "Long" Lunch

The government of Honghe Prefecture, in the south of Yunnan Province, has applied for inclusion to the UN's list of World Natural and Cultural Heritage site, for the terraced fields in the small county of Yuanyang, where each year the Hani people hold a banquet so large that they consume the entire towns.

Around the time of China's Spring Festival, the Hanis celebrate the Yangmatu Festival in honour of their heroes and pray for the union of the Hani people and good harvests. The festival usually lasts for three days, when the locals participate in sacrificial ceremonies in the centre of the village and enjoy food at a grand banquet in the middle of the street. The villagers are more than happy to welcome visitors to join them. All family members reunite during this time, dressing up in their best clothes and rolling out their best dishes to share with neighbours at the street banquet.

Habo Village, Yuanyang County, Yunnan Province

Combat Desertification with Tourism

Chinese experts proposed to accelerate the development of tourism in desert areas as a new way to combat desertification.

The total area of desertified land in China has reached 171 million ha, or 18% of the country's total territory, which is mainly scattered in the 12 provinces and autonomous regions in northern China.

The tourist industry in desert areas is basically nonexistent in China, for most tourists to desert spots are self-organized adventurers. However, there is great prospect for developing tourism in desert areas as these areas are home to 600 kinds of birds, 200 kinds of animals and 800 kinds of plants. Desert areas also have rich natural landscapes including mountains, forest, deserts, grassland, wetland, salt lakes and swamps. Places of cultural interest in desert areas are numerous, including the ancient Silk Road, the Great Wall, Dunhuang Grottoes,Yungang Grottoes and the big and small goose pagodas.

Dunhuang, Gansu Province

List of World Heritage in Danger Helps Protection

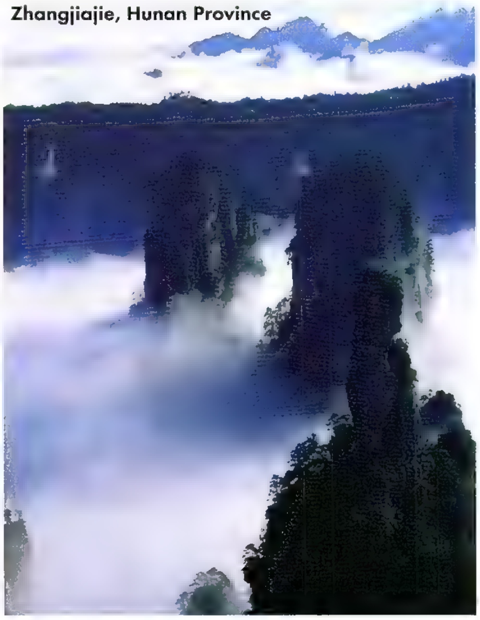
Though many people consider being included in the "List of World Heritage in Danger" a burning shame, experts believed that the existence of such a list does help protect these properties of outstanding value to humanity from disappearing.

The "List of World Heritage in Danger" is a list of properties appearing in the World Heritage List which are facing dangers of destruction or damage caused by natural and artificial factors.

Besides ringing warning bell to governments for protection, properties covered in the list could have more possibilities to get technical and fund assistance from the international community.

So far, China has not appeared on the list, but the World Heritage Committee has issued warnings to China several times. The Wulingyuan Scenic Area in Zhangjiajie in central China's Hunan Province has been warned for its commercialisation, followed by Huangshan Mountain in east China's Anhui Province and Taishan Mountain in east China's Shandong Province.

Zhangjiajie, Hunan Province



Eating Utensils Exhibition

Guangdong Chinese cuisine is one of the world's most unique and diverse. Not surprisingly, the culture of Chinese eating utensils has a long history.

An exhibition of exquisite Chinese tablewares is now open in Guangzhou, the capital of south China's Guangdong Province. Nearly 140 items and sets of tablewares are on display, dating from the New Stone Age to the end of the last feudal monarchy in 1912. The diverse items, of bronze, pottery, gold and other materials, show the evolution of Chinese tableware over the ages. The exhibition will end in December this year.

Shenzhen Waging War against AIDS

Guangdong Hotels in Shenzhen may soon start making condoms available to control the spread of HIV/AIDS in Shenzhen.

The condoms will be placed in hotel rooms throughout Shenzhen and guests will pay to use them, according to the chief of the AIDS control section of Shenzhen Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. The condoms would be cheap and the hotels would make little profit from them. The health bureau was working with other municipal departments to draw up a policy for condoms in hotels.

The city will allocate a sum of money to buy the condoms and provide them to hotels; however, it was up to the public security bureau to decide when the condoms would be available in hotels. The condom program is a spin-off from a campaign to make Shenzhen an exemplary city in controlling AIDS. The city is also working with a US AIDS control project to build a sound system for monitoring, data-collection and analysis.

Shenzhen is waging war against AIDS, which is starting to spread from high-risk groups to the general population. According to a report by the city's public health bureau, Shenzhen has documented some 652 HIV carriers so far with 145 diagnosed as AIDS patients, an average annual increase of 25%.

Shenzhen, Guangdong Province

Carry-on Baggage Limited to Five Kilograms

China Carry on luggage on domestic flights in China is now restricted to five kilograms per person.

Huanglong Airport, Sichuan Province

A regulation on passenger's luggage, released by China's Civil Aviation came into effect in July. Baggage coming in over-weight should be checked through in the hold. Passengers taking flights in first-class will be allowed to carry up to two personal belongings, while those in business and economy-class can only bring one piece of luggage with them.

The size is also restricted to specific dimensions, meaning each passenger can bring 4.4 m^3 of essential bits and pieces during the flight.

Watch out for Japanese Encephalitis

Hong Kong Summer is the crucial period in containing the mosquito-borne Japanese encephalitis. The rainy and wet climate in Hong Kong provided favourable conditions for mosquito breeding. Hong Kong government is considering inoculating pigs to help hinder transmission of the virus to humans, but the best control measure is the elimination of mosquito breeding areas.

Japanese encephalitis is a rare disease in Hong Kong with usually two or less cases reported each year. Last year, about 200 viral encephalitis cases were reported and only one was confirmed to be Japanese encephalitis.

Inoculations for people are not yet worthwhile as the chances of side effects are high. Travellers who planned to stay in endemic areas in Asia and the Western Pacific Region, particularly in rural areas, are advised to consult doctors the need for vaccination before departing.

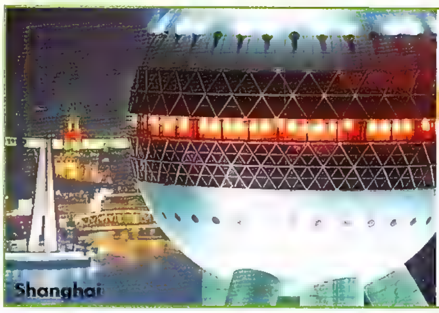
Hong Kong

More Women's Public Toilets in Shanghai

Shanghai Lining up to use woman's lavatories is expected to become history in Shanghai, as the local government will build enough toilets to meet the demand.

The municipal environmental sanitation department estimates that there should be over 30% more toilets for women than for men.

The planning of public lavatories will be one of the topics in the international public toilets forum to be held next year in Shanghai.


Shanghai

China Launches New Air Routes to Yunnan

Yunnan Beijing and Shanghai launched new routes to South China's Yunnan provincial capital of Kunming and the tourism attraction of Dali in July.

The move was to promote the tourism industry in Yunnan, a province renowned for its beautiful landscapes and colourful ethic minorities.

Beijing and Shanghai each opened one flight a day to the two cities.

Chic Bar Featuring Antiques

Anhui Well-preserved for more than 400 years, Xidi Village enjoys its fame for characteristic ancient architectures with more than 300 buildings from the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties,122 of which still remain intact. In 2000, Xidi Village became listed as a world cultural heritage site, which drew unprecedented numbers of tourists.

The Kuangguzhai bar at Xidi Village, made entirely from antiques, offers almost the real experience as 400 years ago. The bar owner is a woman from Beijing, who moved her home to Xidi Village ten years ago after visiting the beautiful ancient village and falling in love with it. She then bought an ancient residence to live in. The bar Kuangguzhai soon became a new hot destination for many tourists, and brought the owner an annual revenue of 80,000 yuan (~US $10,000).

The successful operation of the Kuangguzhai bar provides another alternative for the local government to solve the predicament of earning money for relics protection, which has bothered many Chinese. Now Yixian County, where Xidi village is located, invests tens of millions of yuan in the protection of ancient villages annually.

Xidi Village, Anhui Province

Ancient Roman Civilisation Exhibition

Beijing An exhibition of ancient Roman civilisation has kicked off in June at the National Museum of China in Beijing. 173 priceless artifacts shipped from Italy are being shown at the exhibition.

The treasures have been divided into two parts. One shows the political power and regime transfer of ancient Rome, featuring statues of Augustus Caesar and other Roman emperors, while the other depicts the daily life of Romans, emphasising the economy, culture and customs of the time.

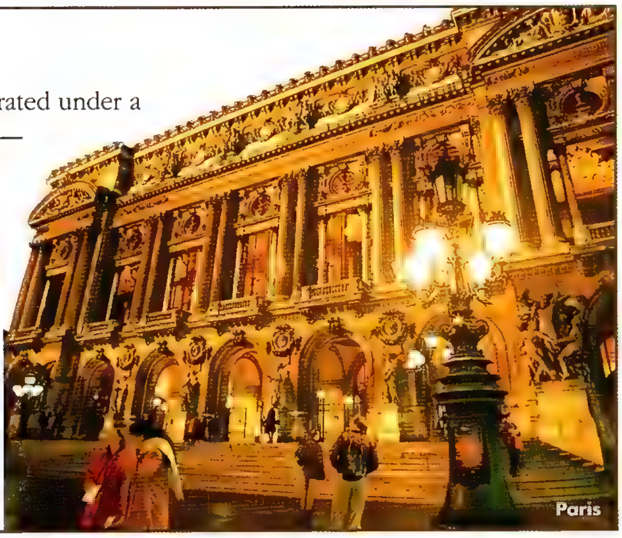
The exhibition is sponsored by the national museum and Italian culture and heritage departments. It will travel to south China's Henan Province in December after finishing its six-month run in Beijing.

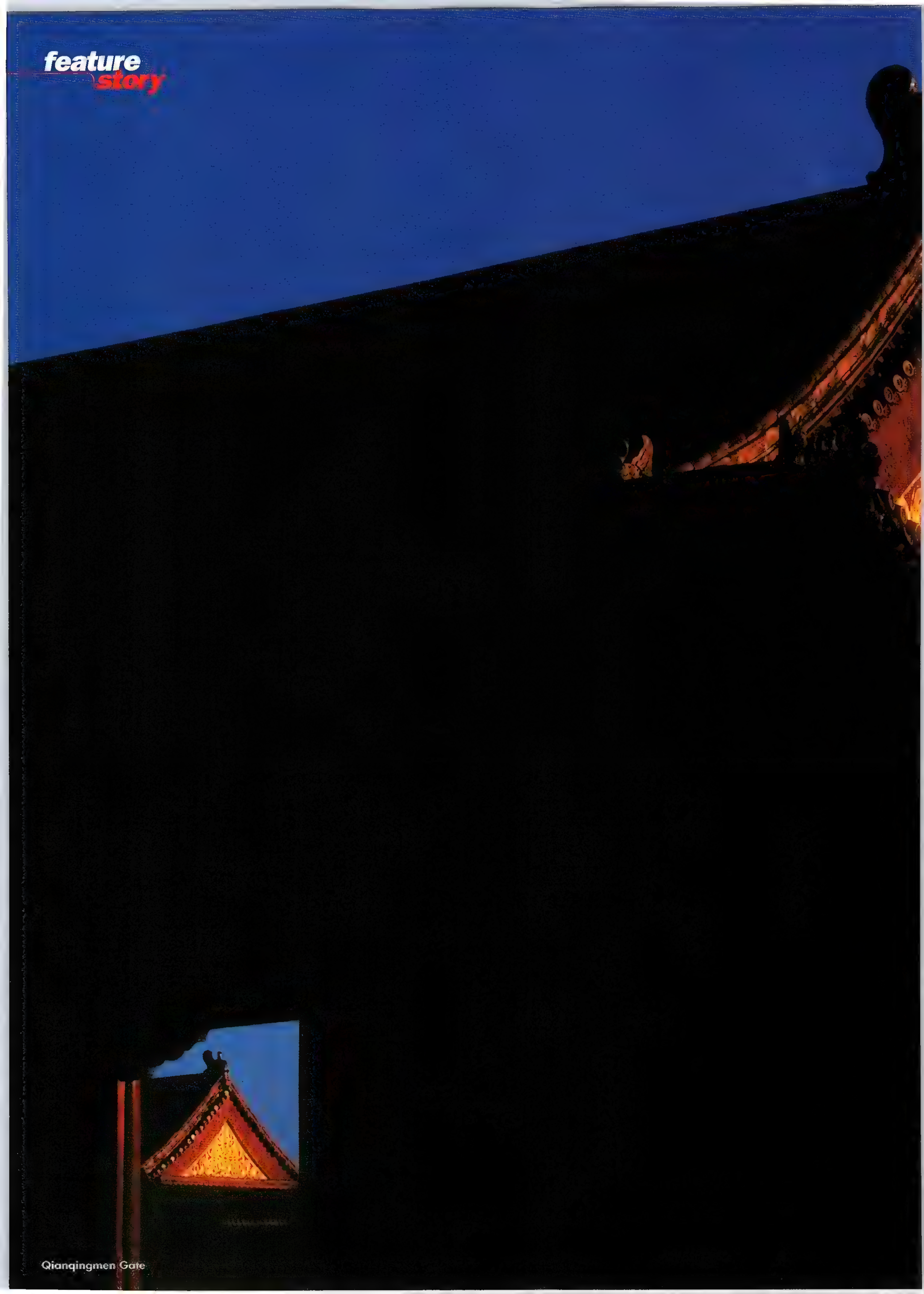
China Southern Goes to Paris

Guangdong The new direct Guangzhou-Paris service, inaugurated under a code share with Air France, is available four times a week — Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday.

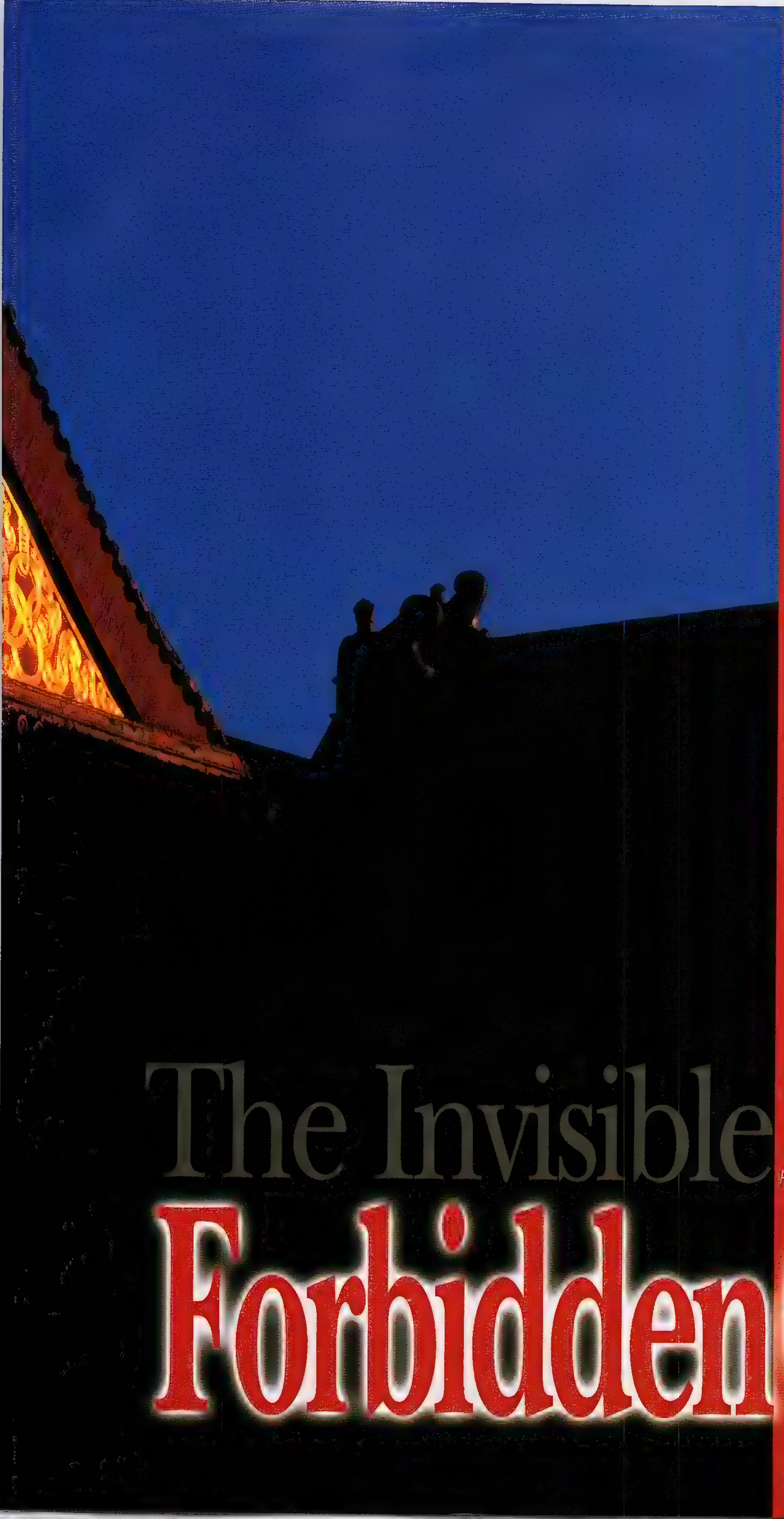
For the time being, the Boeing 777 departs from Guangzhou at 14:30 and arrives in Paris at 21:20 the same day. And flights back to Guangzhou leave at 22:50 from Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris and arrive in Guangzhou at 16:20 the next day.

The Guangzhou-Paris direct flight service was kicked off in early January and Air France has been responsible for the operation of the service with its Airbus 340s. With China Southern's participation, passengers will have a choice of 11 flights a week between Guangzhou and Paris.


Paris

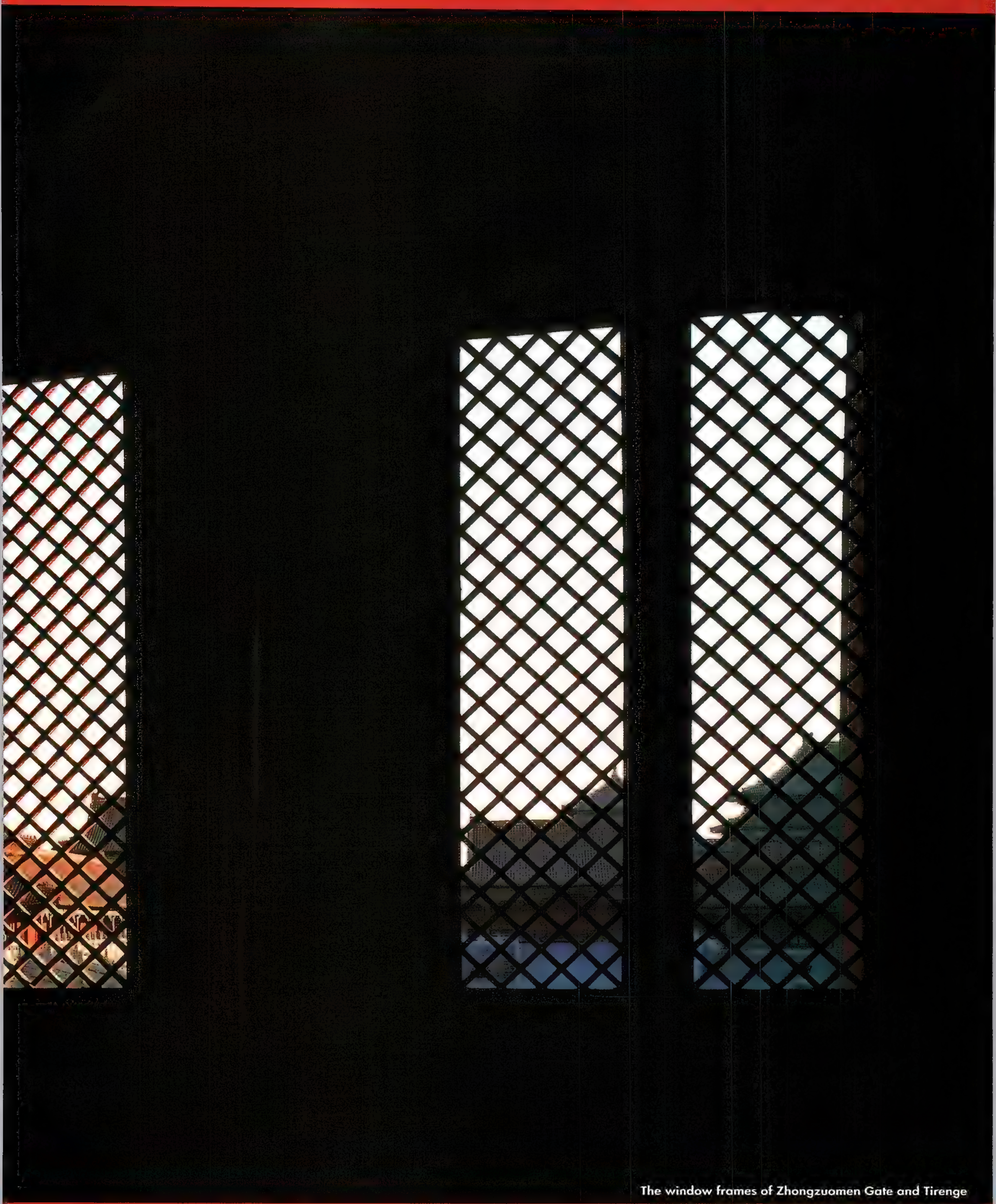


Qianqingmen Gate

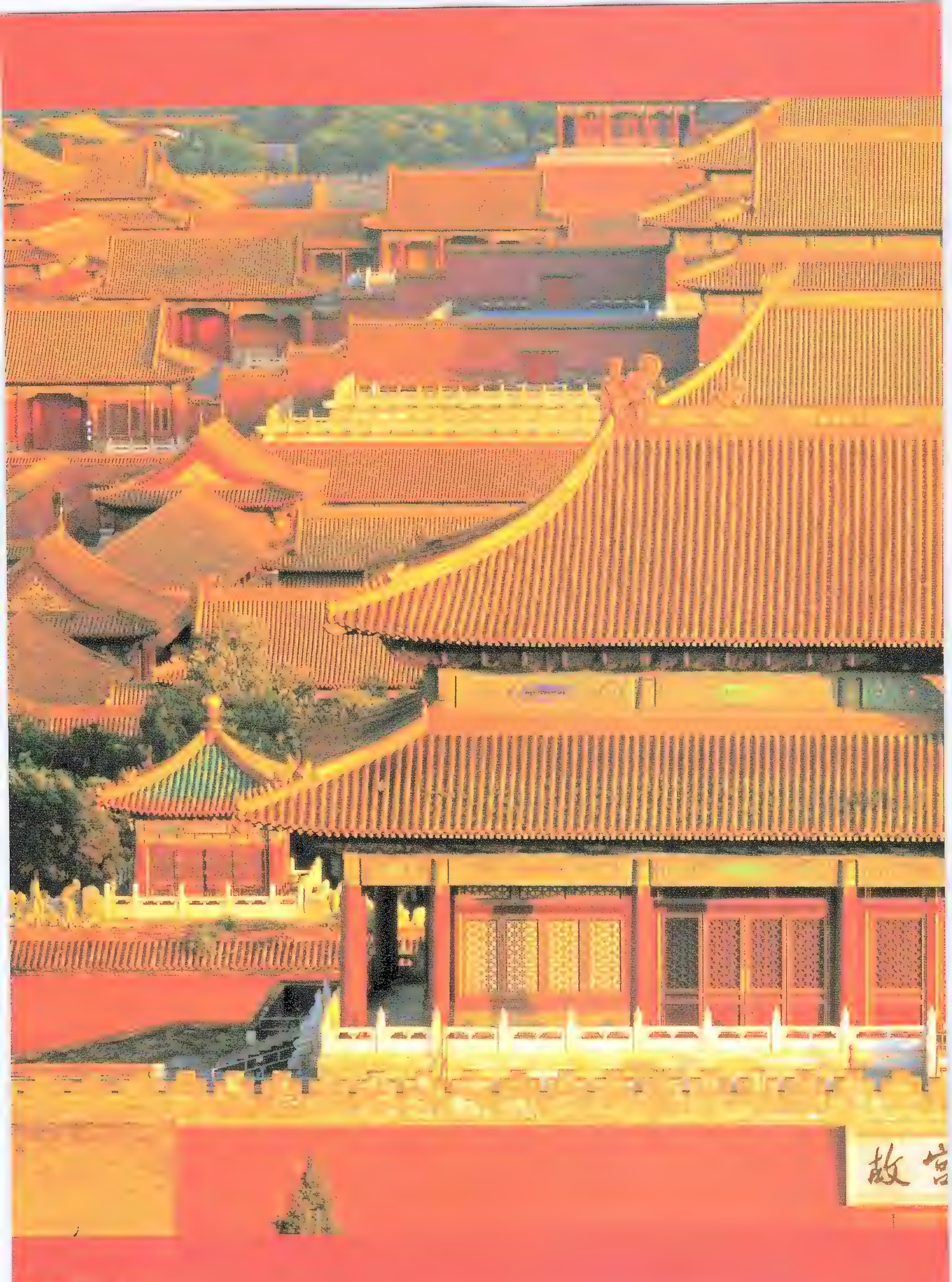


The Invisible Forbidden City

Photos & Article by Li Shaobai



The window frames of Zhongzuomen Gate and Tirenge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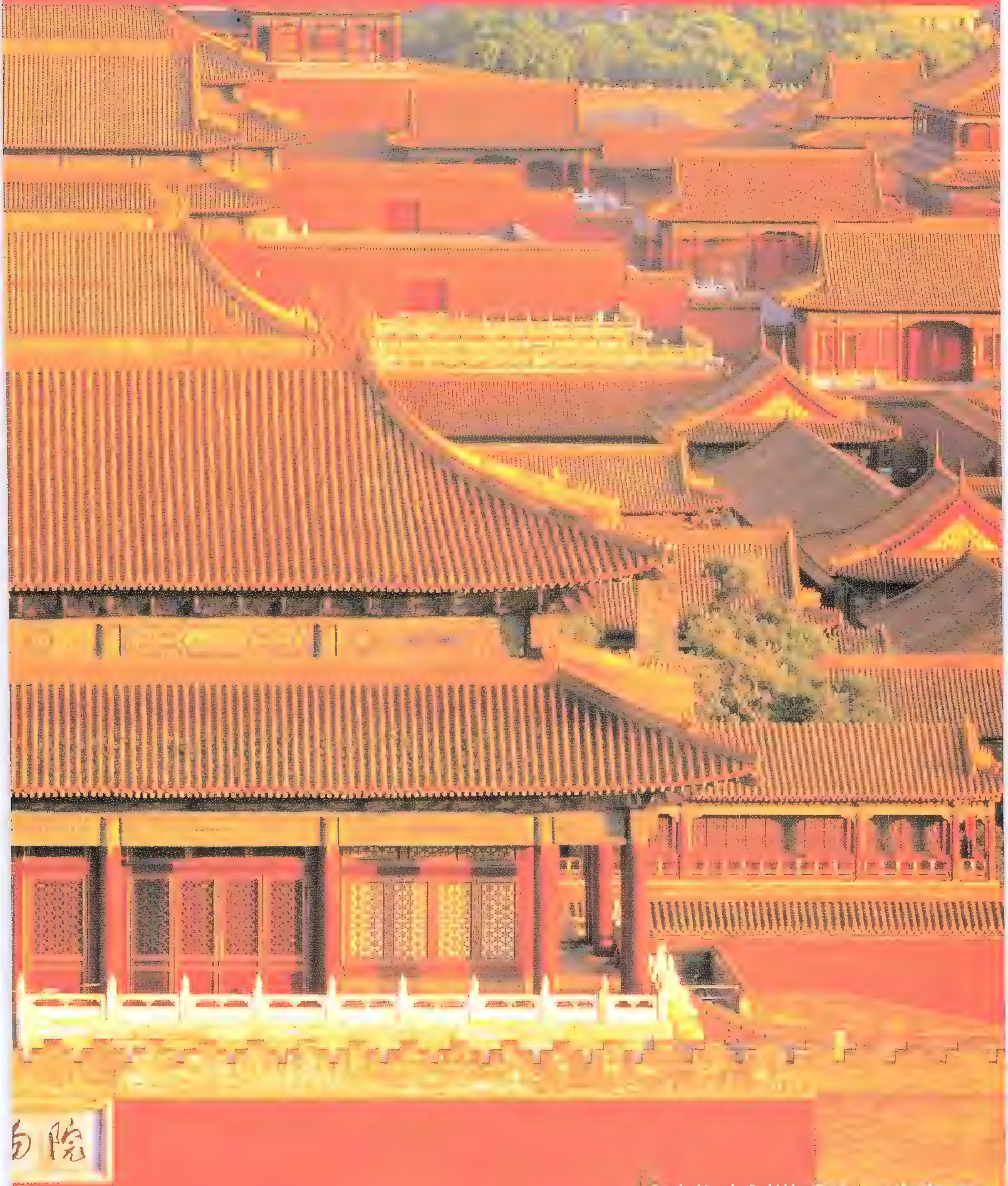


Overlooking the Forbidden City from Jingshan Mountain

The Sun setting over the Forbidden City

The Invisible Forbidden City

Monarchy accompanied China for over 4,000 years. In nearly every dynasty, the emperor would build a new palace, but all the other palaces no longer exist except the Forbidden City of Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1616-1911) dynasties. Forbidden City is not only the exclusive and best-preserved imperial palace left in China, but also the largest in the world. Inside this palace, visitors can savour the glamorous history and cultural heritage of China. Moreover, they can learn about the ancient Chinese architecture, religion, arts, as well as the lives of the emperors ("Son of Heaven"), their mandarins, empresses, imperial chambermaids and eunuchs.

Covering a total area of 720,000 m^2 with 170,000 of it made up of buildings, the Forbidden City is situated right in the centre of Beijing city. The whole palace of nearly 100 courts and over 9000 houses was meticulously built, intended to awe people with its grand atmosphere.

Today, when visitors roam around the labyrinth of the palace beyond the high walls, they can no longer get a glimpse of the historic scenes. The wrath of the emperor, the terror of his bowing mandarins, the melancholy of the heavily made-up empresses and concubines, the loneliness of the chambermaids and the dashing shadows of eunuchs were vanished in time. Yet, the rusty chains hung on the huge doors, with the red paint peeling off, denote an invisible history of palace life. Seeing a tiny flower struggling to grow in a small crack on the wall, I feel as if I capture the dream of a chambermaid. When a few crows dash across the dimly haunted palace walls, I cannot help but recalling the grumbling yet craving glares of the eunuchs.

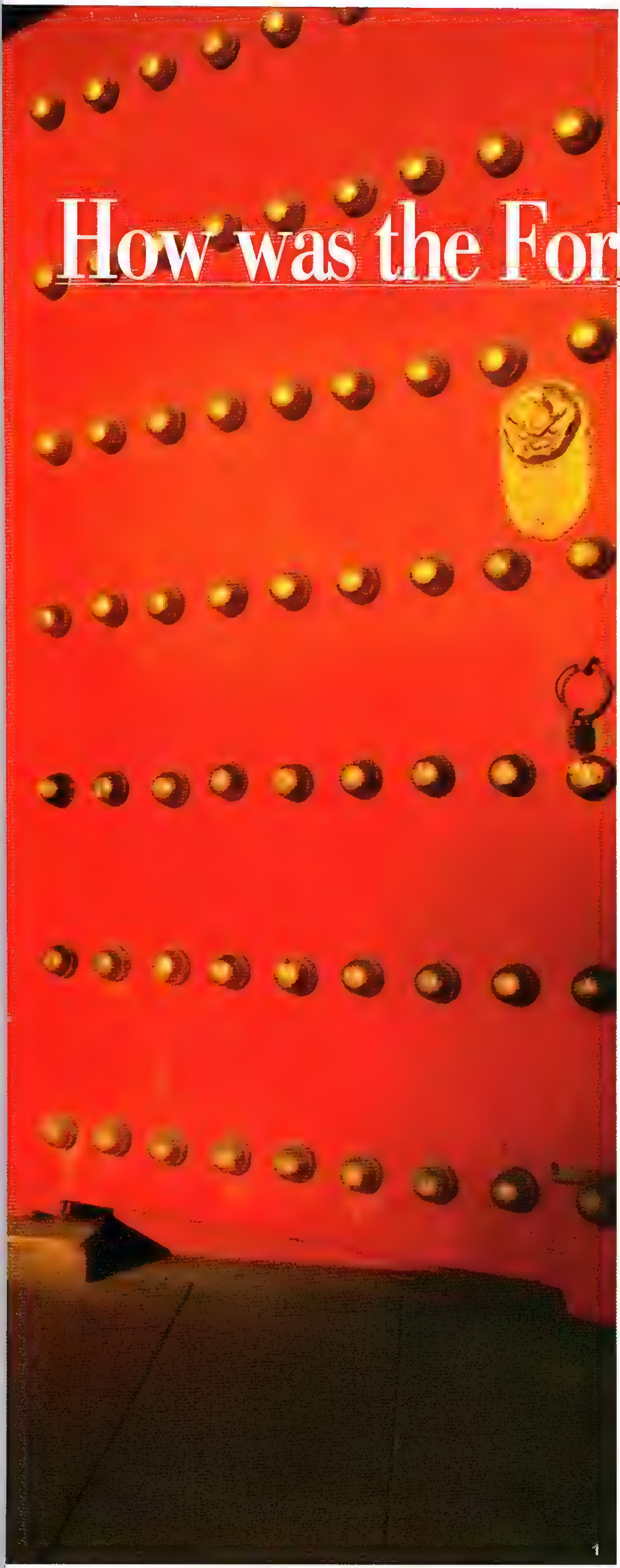
As you walk around the palace, try to listen to, touch, imagine and feel in your heart all the hidden stories of the palace: the imperial grandeur created by the majestic sculptured pillars, the isolated chambermaids sunk into the deep wells, the laughter and tears soaked between the tiles....

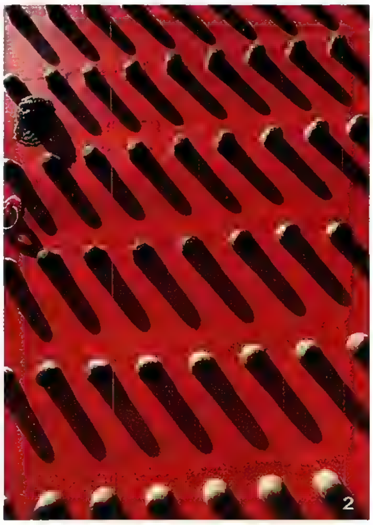
How was the Forbidden City built?

In 1403, Zhu Di, the fourth son of the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty, started a revolt and took over the throne. Three years later, he planned to relocate the capital city from Nanjing to Beijing, because the new national capital was a more topographically advantageous position in defense and control. The Juyongguan Pass in the north could act as a strategic fortress, Taihang Mountains in the west a shelter, Bohai (Bo Sea) in the east a passage, and the plateau in the south an access.

The construction of the Forbidden City took 14 years, and it was finished in 1920. However, the actual relocation did not take place until 1936. From then on, Beijing has remained the capital city ever since.

Like other palaces in China, the Forbidden City was built with a wood-concrete structure, except for the terraces. The timber was transported along rivers to Beijing from southern provinces thousands of miles away, such as Sichuan, Jiangxi, Zhejiang, Hunan and Guangdong, and it cost a tremendous fortune. The renovation of the three main halls alone cost over nine million ounces of silver. The stone used for construction was granite from the outskirts of Beijing. Transporting the granite was an extremely difficult task. As for the bricks, they were made in neighbouring province, and the majority of them were about one-and-a-half feet long, seven-and-a-half inches wide, and three-and-half inches high, weighing about 25 kg. The whole palace used over 10 million bricks. The bricks used inside the palace chambers were called "Golden Bricks", which involved 26 steps and took two years to produce. One of the procedures was to soak the brick in Tung oil, a valuable wood-oil. Golden bricks were made in the distant southern





1. **Queyoumen Gate and Dongyanchilou**
2. **Gate of the Palace**

regions such as Suzhou and Changzhou. The red walls of the palace symbolised serenity and reverence whereas the yellow tiles represented the centre location according to the Chinese astronomy. All ancient Chinese empires used yellow as their imperial symbol, and the three palaces in the south inhabited by the princes, could only use green tiles for the sake of hierarchy. The libraries used black tiles, which signified water, symbolically keeping the place safe from fire.

The layout of the Forbidden City denoted the supremacy of the emperor. An axis penetrated all the way through the palace from north to south. At the front of the axis, situated the three main halls: Hall of Supreme Harmony (Taihedian), Hall of Central Harmony (Zhonghedian), and Hall of Preserving Harmony (Baohedian). They were the symbol of supreme authority. At the back of the axis laid another three inner palaces: Palace of Heavenly Purity (Qianqinggong), Hall of Union (Jiaotaidian), and Palace of Earthly Tranquillity (Kunninggong). In the inner palace laid two other axes both left and right. On one side rested the empresses' residence (Ningshougong), and the other the princes' and princesses' residence (Zininggong). In between the major central axis and the two subsidiary axes laid the Palace of Abstinence (Zhaigong) and the Hall of Mental Cultivation (Yangxindian). Beyond them were the six palaces of east and west wings, which were the residences of the empresses and concubines.

Roughly about a kilometre in length and width, the massiveness of the Forbidden City can only be experienced in person. If a newborn baby switches to a different bedroom every night, he would be 27 years old before sleeping in the same room twice.

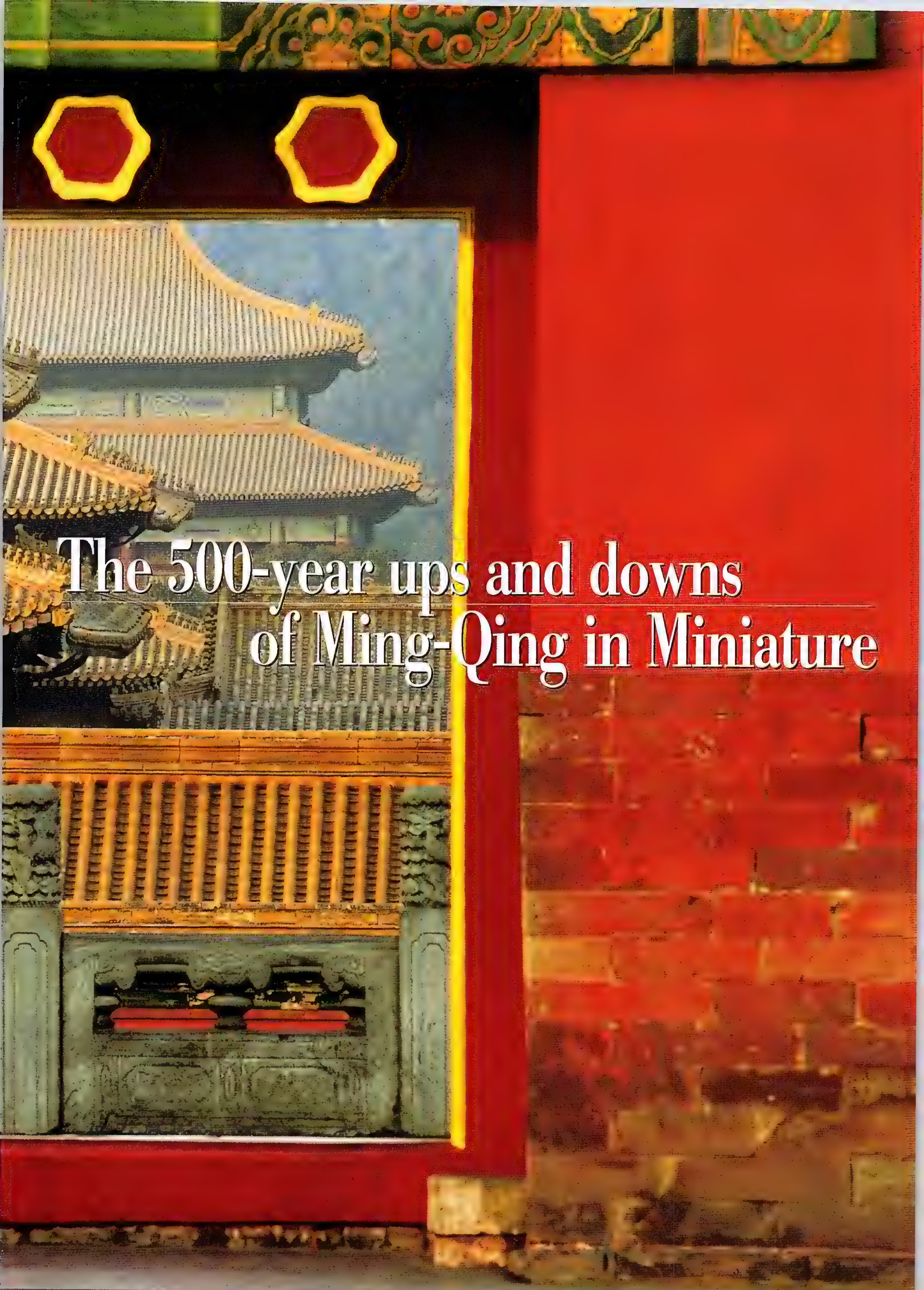
The imperial palace had four gates: Wumen Gate in the south, Shenwumen Gate in the north, Xihuamen Gate in the west and Donghuamen Gate in the east. The whole palace is surrounded by a 10 m high and 3,400 m long wall. The wall is 6.66 m thick at the top and 8.6 m at the bottom. Watchtower was built at each corner. Apart from these, the palace was surrounded by a 52 m wide and 3,800 m long trench.

The setting of the Hall of Supreme Harmony was to emphasise the absolute supremacy of the emperors. It was built on three terraces of 9 m. Yet, this three-storey-high terrace seemed not imposing enough for the emperor. There was another 1.6 m-high, seven-step wooden stand on top of the terrace. Higher still, an extra stand was placed on top of it, followed by the throne. When the officials bowed down to the emperor, they were a whole 11 m lower.

1. The copper lion in front of Yangxingmen Gate

2. Taihemen Gate

2



The 500-year ups and downs of Ming-Qing in Miniature

Like commoners, the emperor also had to work. His daily routine was to attend the imperial audience. The emperors in the early Ming Dynasty all went to the imperial audience daily, except during festivals. Before daybreak, the emperors would leave the inner palace by the imperial carriage to go to the throne in Fengtianmen Gate (or Qianqingmen Gate during the Qing Dynasty). There he would listen to the reports of the mandarins and give out orders. When the emperor settled in his dragon-craved throne, namely the golden terrace, a eunuch would place an exquisite incense burner on the table, commencing the imperial audience.

Afterwards, officials from different departments would bring their memorials to the emperor. Each memorial carried one issue. The emperor would then ask the councilors to receive the memorials, and he would decide when to end the imperial audience. Yet, the emperors of the mid and late Ming Dynasty were corrupted and slothful. They relied on the eunuchs and ignored all their duties. Some broke the routine of attending the imperial audience, and one emperor even renounced imperial audience for 24 years.

However, the Qing emperors did a much better job than those in the previous dynasty. Emperor Kangxi (1662-1722) was the most diligent of them all. Under his leadership, the country successfully unified Taiwan, fought off the Russian, and reclaimed lost territory at the border.

The Revolt of Fengtianmen Gate

Over the 500-year history of Ming and Qing dynasties, a number of significant episodes took place in the Forbidden City.

In 1457, Ming Emperor Yingzong, who had lost his throne eight years earlier, led a revolt and successfully

reclaimed power from the then-current ailing emperor at the Fengtianmen Gate.

Another bizarre incident happened at this gate as well in 1539. One evening, a mad commoner somehow sneaked into the palace and headed straight to the Fengtianmen Gate. He managed to spend the whole night sitting nude on the throne before being discovered by a eunuch on duty early next morning. The man turned out to be a jobless outlaw from the city, and he was sentenced to death. Nonetheless, the execution never took place, and the event remained an odd mystery from then on.

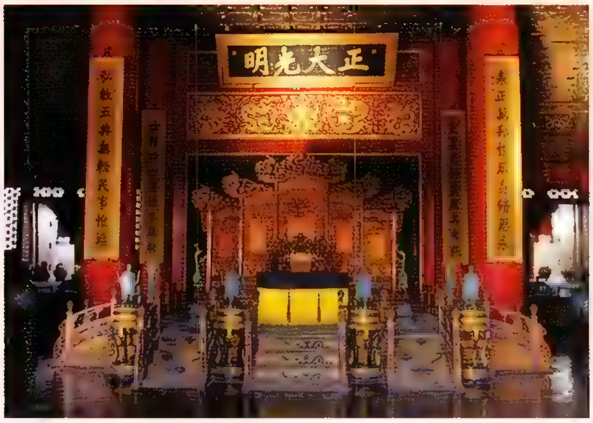
The Palace Coup

During the Ming dynasty in 1542, a group of chambermaids could no longer tolerate the abusive Emperor Jiajing and secretly planned an assassination. They tried to strangle the emperor in the Palace of Heavenly Purity. Unfortunately, the young chambermaids became too neurotic to complete their murder plan. They were all caught and executed in public. Although the emperor was spared death, he was much traumatized and became temporary mute. When he returned to full health, he dared not stepping into the Palace of Heavenly Purity again. Because of this incident, he moved to Wanshou Palace, outside the Forbidden City, for over 20 years. It was not until December of 1567 that he made his first return, but he died on that day because of illness.

Leaving the Palace in Tears

During the end of Ming Dynasty, the governing bodies were so corrupted that rebellions spread like wild fire

Previous page: The side door of the Hall of Supreme Harmony
1. The square in front of the Hall of Supreme Harmony (Taihedian)
2. Inside the Hall of Heavenly Purity (Qianqinggong)



The Secret Appointment of a Crown Prince

Since Emperor Kangxi, the Qing imperial court had adopted the tradition of Han people, which was to pass down the throne to the emperor's first-born son. But the system had loopholes. First of all, it was not always the case that the eldest son was talented in leadership; and if the emperor decided to make a change, it might cause conflicts between brothers. For instance, because Emperor Kangxi abrogated and then restored the same crown prince twice, it caused instability in the nation.

Emperor Yongzheng, Kangxi's fourth son, ascended the throne at 45. Having seen with his own eyes how his father had been troubled by the matter, Emperor Yongzheng made the decision in the first year of his reign that the selection of the emperor's successor should be kept secret until the death of the emperor. The emperor would write the name of the chosen prince on a piece of paper, which was to be kept in a box and hidden behind the signboard of Justice and Honour (hung in the Palace of Heavenly Purity, where the emperor met his ministers and handled state affairs). The secret would be kept revealed at the emperor's deathbed. As the princes knew nothing of their father's choice, they would all work hard to improve themselves. Because of the new heir system, the feudal system as well as the nation remained comparatively stable.

throughout the country. People were so desperate for a better change that even the guards decided to join the rebellion forces. On the evening of March 18 of 1644, a palace front guard opened the city gate to welcome the rebels.

Having learnt of the betrayal, Emperor Chongzhen gathered his two sons to the Palace of Heavenly Purity, and asked them to disguise themselves as commoners. He reminded them, "You are both princes today, but will be commoners tomorrow. In this chaotic time, disguise yourselves and hide your names. When you come upon elders, honour them; and when you encounter young men, be humble and respectful. If you can save your lives, remember to avenge your parents. Never ever forget what I told you today." That being said, everyone there broke into tears.

Afterwards, the emperor ordered the death of his empress and concubine. The empress threw herself into the well in the Palace of Earthly Tranquillity. When his concubine hanged herself, the rope snapped and she was dropped onto the floor in a coma. Emperor Chongzhen then took out his sword and ended her life. He also stabbed his 6-year-old daughter to death and injured another daughter. At last, the emperor bade farewell to the palace and headed for Jingshan Hill. Left with an imperial decree written in blood, he hanged himself on the hill the next day before dawn.

The Power of Clubbing

Tolstoy once said that the Chinese administrated their country by beating people. He might not be far wrong. Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang (r. 1368-1398), founder of the Ming Dynasty, clubbed more than 1,000 ministers in his court, creating a world record. You can imagine the scene: the usually honourable court officials all crouched in front of the Wumen Gate of the Forbidden City with their bottoms exposed. As they were beaten, they cried, "Long live your Majesty!" or "Thanks for your mercy!" But in their hearts, they could not help lamenting how terrible it was to work for such emperor.

Sounds of clubbing were often heard in the Forbidden City, as the emperors would not hesitate to club those whom he found offensive. Though the civil and military officials appeared to be prominent, but their positions or even lives had no protection from the emperor, who might order death or clubbing at will. Gestures such as fidgeting, coughing and spitting were straightly forbidden. The punishment was serious: either having the salary reduced or the position lowered. Such happenings were commonplace in ancient China. Anyone who displeased the emperor would be treated as a criminal. Therefore, when the ministers went to the palace to see the emperor, they must be on guard. A careless remark might possibly cause imprisonment or even the lives of his whole family.

Dying Young in Wuyingdian Hall

On March 19, 1644, the rebellion leader Li Zicheng galloped into the Forbidden City, and declared himself the new master. The suicide of Emperor Chongzhen left the Ming General Wu Sangui caught between two enemies: Li

Zicheng and the Qing army, who were originally kept at bay in the north-eastern region. Wu finally decided to cast his lot with the Qing army and led them to fight against Li. Li's army was defeated and he decided to abandon the capital and retreat to the west in April. Before leaving Beijing, Li enthroned himself in a rush on April 27. That evening, the self-enthroned emperor lit up all the towers in the palace and left.

New Master of the Forbidden City

On May 2 of 1644, Duo Er Gun led his Qing troops into Beijing. Complying with the pleas of the Ming officials, he entered the Forbidden City in an imperial carriage. Duo Er Gun went directly to the Hall of Martial Prowess (Wuyingdian) and sat on the throne, with all Ming officials bowing down to him on the floor proclaiming "Long life!"

Duo Er Gun commanded his army not to harm a single person or to claim a thing after entering the capital. Furthermore, they were to arrange an imperial burial for the former Emperor Chongzhen and mourn for three day. At last, Duo Er Gun announced that all the surrendered Ming officials were to keep their official status.

The Diligent Emperor Kangxi

To understand how the emperors attended the imperial

1. The stone lions seated at the Taihemen Gate
2. A tower with up-turned eaves at the Wumen Gate

audience, you need to look at the example of Emperor Kangxi (1662-1722). When he ascended the throne at the age of eight, his mother asked him what he wanted most in his life. Kangxi replied, "I don't have any desire apart from the peace and harmony of the nation." The whole life of Kangxi could indeed sum up in his commitment.

For half a century, Emperor Kangxi attended the imperial audience in Qianqingmen Gate every morning. During his youth, the early audience usually ended at seven in the morning. Later, it was rescheduled to begin at seven in summer and spring, and eight in autumn and winter. Kangxi even wrote an ode to praise his own mandarins:

"In early hours, I consulted my intelligent officials.

Wise words would be given and government affairs would be taken care of.

I could hardly cast away the gloom from the rain, nor could I be satisfied with my rule.

Past sages and scholars seemed to have been waiting for the day to break.

My respect deepened day by day in hopes of heavenly blessings."

The mandarins were touched by the diligence of Kangxi. In the 32nd year of Kangxi's rule, the imperial scholars suggested that the emperor could attend the audience every three to four days. Yet, he replied, "I have been attending the audience for 30-odd years, and it has become a routine that I cannot live without. If I were to attend merely every three to four days, I could not keep my mind sharp."

Emperor Kangxi was committed to his filial duty. Every morning after the imperial audience, he would pay a visit to his mother. In the early afternoon, he would often go to the Palace of Heavenly Purity again to inquire about the state affairs, listen to the teaching of ancient scriptures by scholars, have private discussion with some mandarins, or bring gifts to his top officials. Moreover, he maintained excellent diplomatic relationship with the Mongolian and other ethnic emperors in the west.

Well rounded, Emperor Kangxi was very knowledgeable and spent a great deal of time learning about mathematics and new technologies from the west. Once, he allowed his officials to move close to his throne, so that he could clarify the method of measuring river current. Kangxi then demonstrated the use of a sundial in details. All these efforts were to make his mandarins understand the importance of science.

Emperor Kangxi loved his subjects deeply. Once there was a drought in the north, and the apprehensive emperor prayed in the palace for days and walked all the way to the Altar of Heaven to plead for rain. He did not bring along any bodyguards and all the officials that followed were dressed in plain clothes.

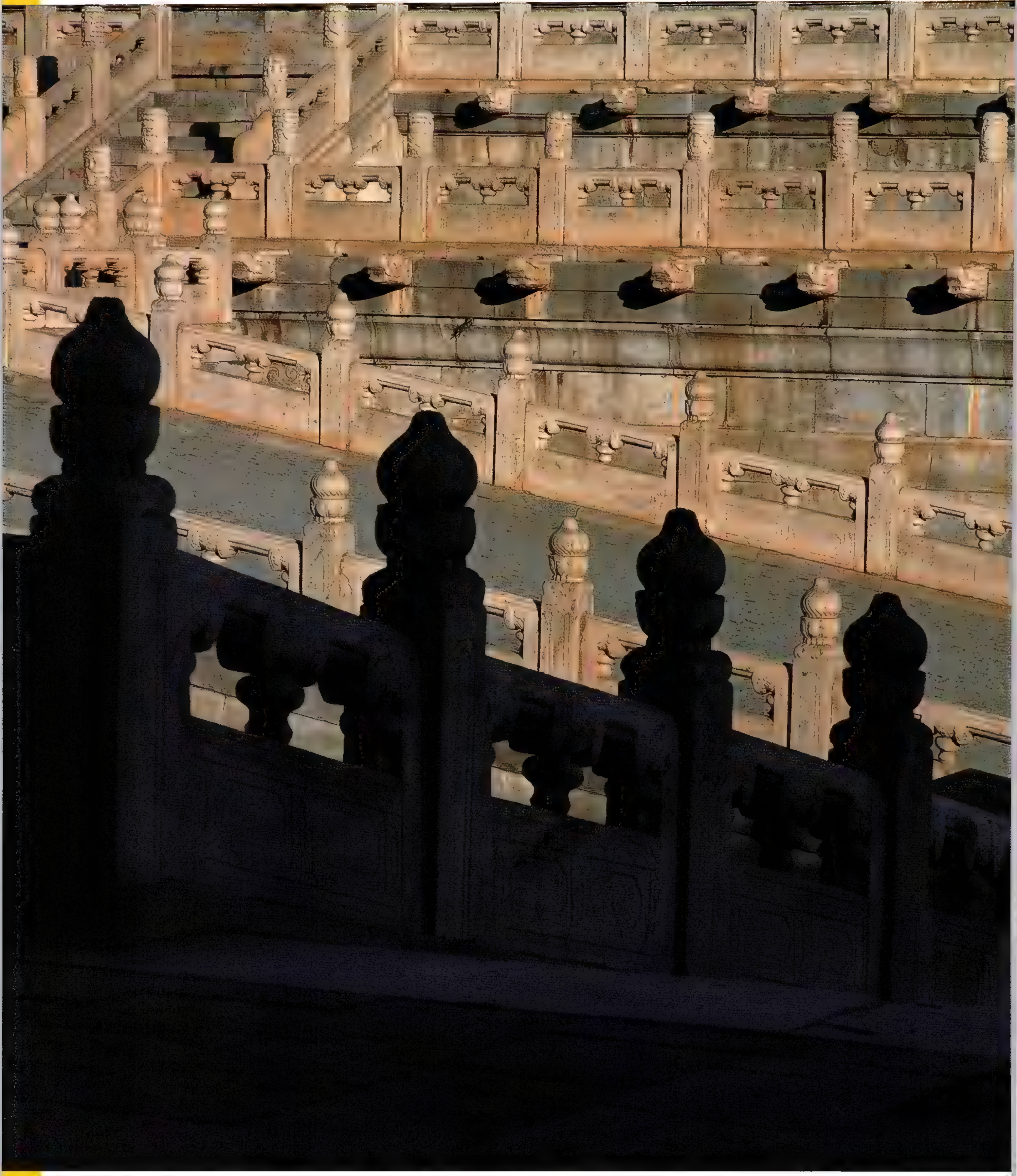
Officials Going to the Imperial Audience

Today, it's hard for us to imagine what it was like to attend the imperial audience as officials. Every morning, they had to get up at about 3 or 4 a.m., leave home by 5 a.m., and go to the palace by carriage or sedan chair. Officials who were living in the south of the capital had to wait till 5 a.m. when the guards opened the front gate. Then they rushed in and darted to the Wumen Gate and waited for it to open.

Since the officials must recite the memorial to the emperor, most of them would be learning their memorial by heart nervously during the journey. Officials could enter the palace for imperial audience through Wumen Gate, Donghuamen Gate, or Xihuamen Gate.

1. The Zhongyoumen Gate
2. The Jinshui River and Wumen Gate

2



However, the Shenwumen Gate, which led straight to the back palace, was strictly forbidden to the officials. As soon as the gates were open, the officials would enter the temporary office in Qianqingmen Gate in trepidation, in order and in silence, waiting for the emperor to come.

Officials had to attend early for the imperial audience, and so did the emperor. Qing emperors got up at about 5 to 6 a.m. at the latest every morning. Emperor Kangxi woke up even earlier. Sometimes he did not sleep at all. Emperor Qianlong (1736-1795) even got up at 3 a.m. during his final years. Both emperors and officials attended their audience so early because it was believed that working early in the morning denoted a sense of diligence and ambition, as well as honesty and candidness. Working at night, on the other hand, suggests wickedness and darkness. As such, officials did not regard the early audience as a hardship, but an honour.

Being late at the morning audience was considered a fatal mistake. The offender would be rebuked by the emperor, and brought shame upon himself. As a result, officials were rarely late. During the rule of Qianlong, his brother-in-law was late once. The guard on duty mocked him, "Why are you catching your breath? Perhaps you're too fat." Emperor Qianlong was equally harsh and said, "You're not only fat in your body, but your heart as well."

Once, Emperor Daoguang (1821-1850) attended the imperial audience earlier than usual, and he found out that there were a total of 38 officials late on that day. The irritated emperor punished all these officials severely. Since then, there was an unwritten rule of attending to imperial audience early even if the officials were gravely ill. And for that reason, there was one fragile senior official fainted on the spot in the middle of his presentation, and even worse, one official actually died on his way to the audience.

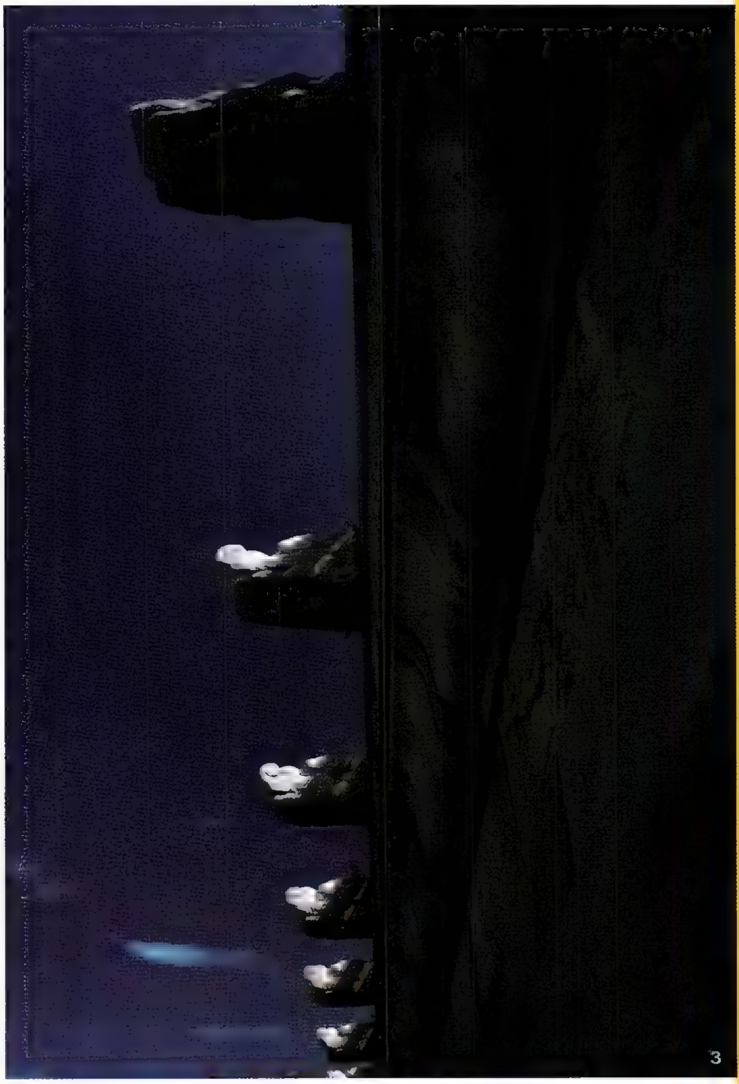
An Arrow on Longzongmen Gate

In 1813, a world-shaking event took place in the Palace. On the southern outskirts of Beijing, two men named Lin Qing and Li Wencheng led a religious sect called "Divine Law". They lured many unlearned but brawny farmers to their cause. Conspired with the eunuchs in the palace, they invaded the Forbidden City in September. As the Emperor Jiaqing was on his way to Bejing from Rehe, there were not enough imperial guards, and soon the palace was in chaos.

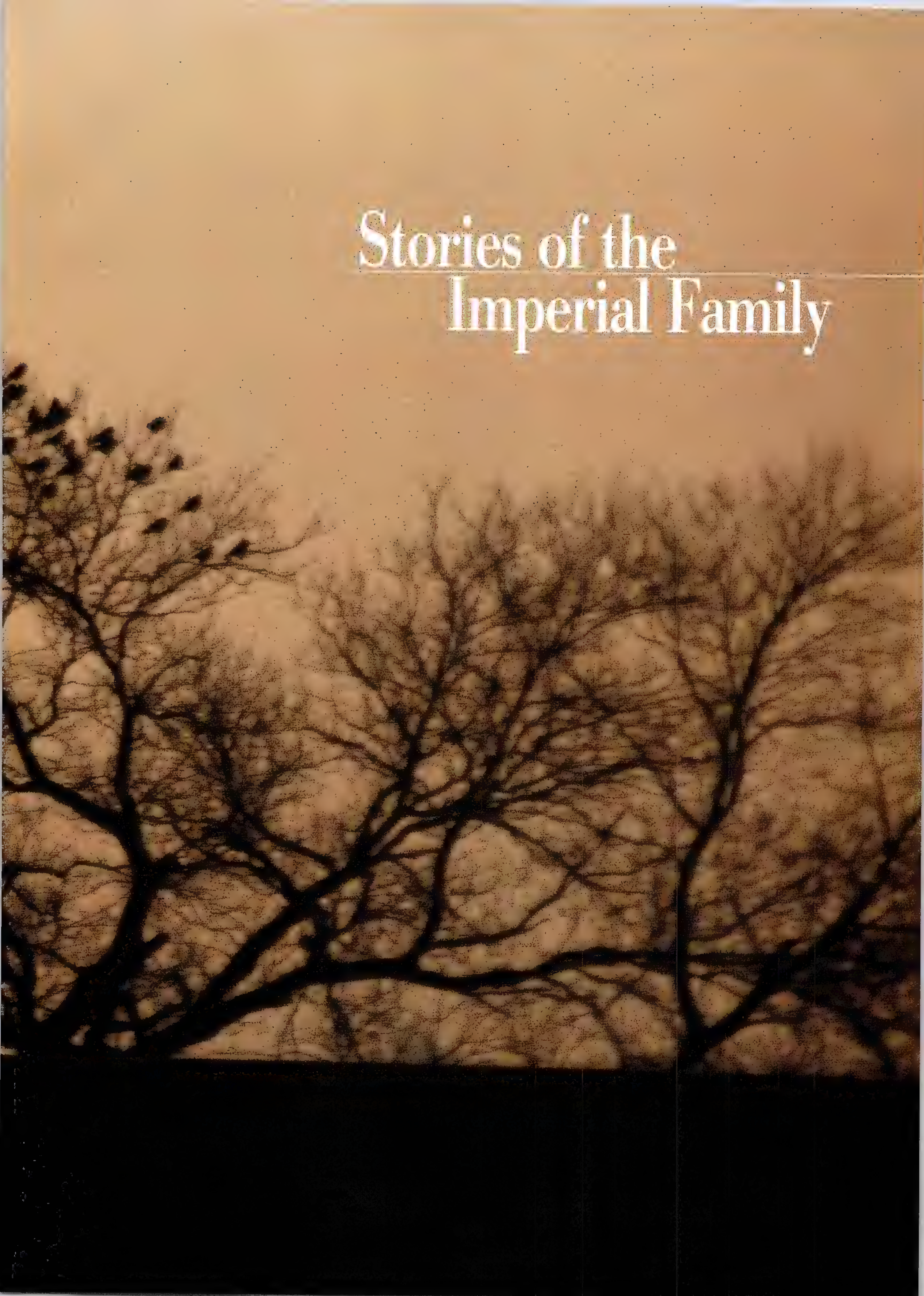
The second son of the Emperor, who later became Emperor Daoguang, was studying at Qiangqingmen Gate at the time. Having learnt of the revolt, the prince took out his rifle at once and shot couple rebels at the Hall of Mental Cultivation.

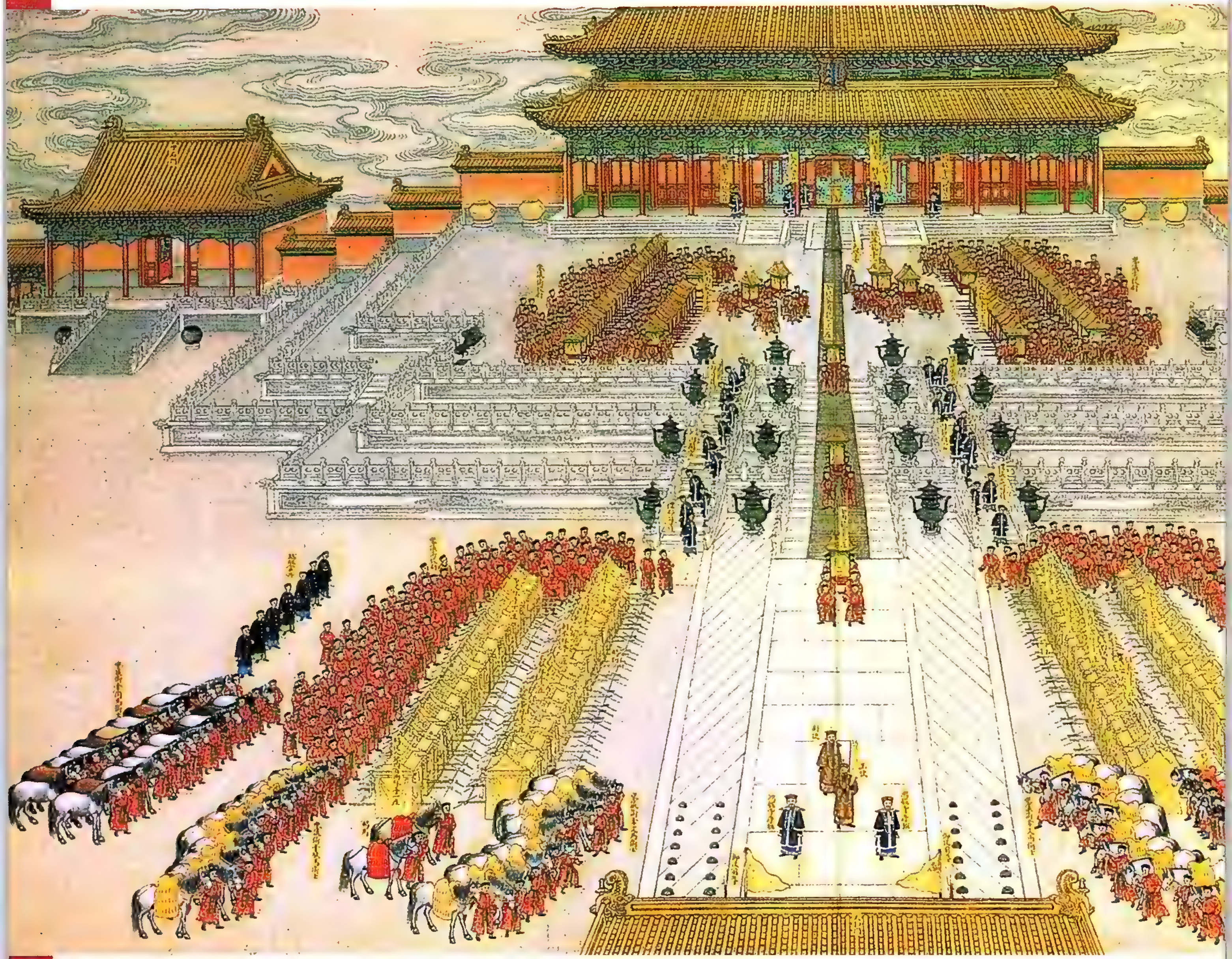
When the emperor returned, he praised the prince with an imperial decree. Till today, a rusty arrow still stuck on the horizontal tablet over the door of Longzongmen Gate. It is said that the arrow was shot when the imperial guards were fighting against the "Divine Law" sect.

1. **The terrace on which Hall of Supreme Harmony Hall is seated is made of marble.**
2. **A fallen dragonhead.**
3. **The dragonheads on guard bar**



Stories of the Imperial Family





Emperors spent their office time early in the morning, and for the rest of the day, they would have to deal with their empresses, concubines, eunuchs and maids.

The dominating ideology of the Chinese monarchy was Confucianism, which emphasised on loyalty and filial piety. The core value of filial piety was to expand the family lineage; therefore, bearing children had a particular importance for the royal family. It was always a great historical event in the palace to crown an empress or to choose imperial concubines.

Emperors usually got married at 16, though there was no formal rule about it. Empress Dowager, the emperor's mother, was responsible to pick the wedding day. After the wedding, the empress became the "Mother of the Nation" and the administrator of the inner palace.

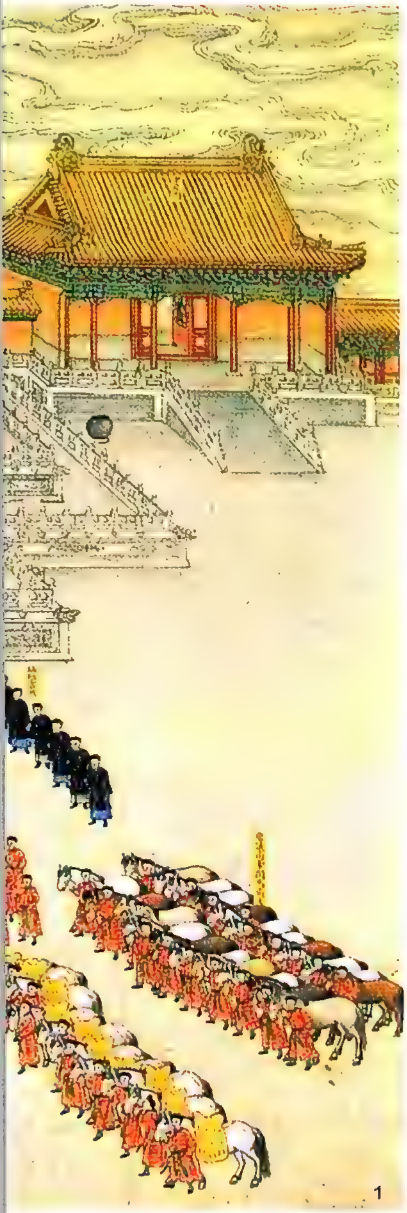
Selecting an Empress

While selecting an empress, emperors and their mothers usually had different preferences. Young emperors, of course, preferred attractive young maids; their Empress Dowager, on the contrary, would tend to put the interest of her family above everything else. Many of them would choose the future empresses among the daughters of their relatives so as to keep the status of their family powerful. For instance, Empress Dowager Cixi chose her niece to be the wife of Emperor Guangxu (1875-1908). Even though the emperor himself was in love with the daughter of the chief administrator, he could do nothing but complied to the arrange marriage.

The Imperial Marriage Life

The emperor started his life as a married man on the wedding night. The bride's chamber was set in the Palace of Earthly Tranquillity.

Puyi, the last emperor of Qing Dynasty (1909), described his wedding night in his autobiography:



"According to tradition, the emperor and his empress should spend their first night together in a room of about 10 m^2 in the Palace of Earthly Tranquillity. There was not much furniture in the room, and the brick bed occupied one-quarter of the room. Everything in the room was painted red except the floor. When I entered the dark red chamber, I could hardly breath. The bride was sitting on the bed with her head bending low. I stood by her and looked around. Everything in front of me was red: red bedding, red clothes, red flowers and a reddened face. I seemed to be standing on a melted red candle."

Although they lived a luxury life in the inner palace, empresses were often depressed about their love life. For one thing, emperors rarely enjoyed arrange marriage, and most importantly, since empresses were to be the proper national figure, they could not give full play to their female charm. This put them at a disadvantageous position in competing for favour with the concubines.

The concubines, most of whom started their lives in the palace as maids, would desperately try every means to draw the emperor's attention. Some ambitious concubines would even attempt to seize the position of empress.

Lives of the Imperial Concubines

Only a very small number of concubines could find true happiness in the palace. Most of them were not as fortunate.

The imperial concubines were all given a title and they lived in the six inner palaces. The empress who occupied the Central Palace was their leader. In the Ming Dynasty, concubines were divided into seven classes, and they were expanded to eight in the Qing Dynasty. As the emperor could only be with one concubine each night, majority of the concubines and maids could only spend their lonely nights sighing and groaning. The most terrible custom was that during the Ming Dynasty, when the emperor died, all his imperial

Previous page: A watchtower of the Forbidden City
1. A scene of the grand ceremony of Emperor Guangxu's wedding
2. Portrait of Emperor Guangxu in imperial costume
3. Portrait of empress of Guangxu in imperial costume

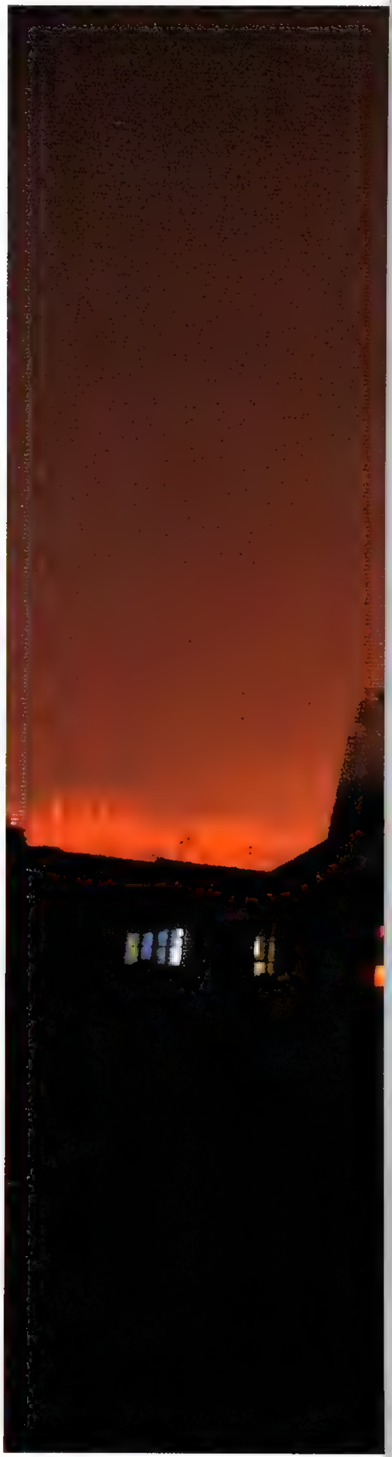
concubines were to be buried as sacrificial objects.

These imperial concubines would be given a banquet before their burial. But how could these young ladies enjoy their last meal? After this farewell banquet, they would be led to a hall, where, one by one, they would climb up a stool and put their heads into a noose. The eunuchs in charge of the execution would order the removal of the stools and they were to witness the death of all the imperial concubines.

Shameless Debauchery

Some of the Ming-dynasty emperors were especially promiscuous. Emperor Zhengde (1506-1521) was an extreme example. Having a quarter of his blood from the minority ethnic group of Yao, he was brawny and reckless. He loved horse riding and could run several hundred kilometres on horseback without a break during a day and a night. The emperor once built a palace named Leopard House in his west garden, in which he housed beauties selected from various parts of the country. But still, he soon grew tired of these women, and often roamed the city instead. This was the beginning of his series of hideous felonies. The emperor would break into any decent mansion he set his eyes upon, and then rape the women he desired. He wouldn't even spare the married or the pregnant women. The crimes of Emperor Zhengde eventually spread out to many neighbouring cities.

His successor Emperor Jiajing (1522-1566) was just as revolting. Since Jiajing was exceedingly superstitious, he gathered many sorcerers to make immortal pills for him. One of his sorcerers, Zhao Yuanjie, became his teacher of honour. Zhao was a notorious character who raped a young virgin each day, with the excuse of extracting blood from her first period to make medicine. The emperor believed his lies and allowed such wicked perversion. He indulged himself excessively in lust and philtres that he even renounced imperial attendance for more than two decades!



There were exceptions though. Emperor Shenzong (1573-1619) stayed in power for 48 years since he was 10. He had the longest rule among the Ming emperors. Unlike his predecessors, he refused to take philtres. The Last emperor of the Ming Dynasty, Emperor Chongzhen (1628-1644), who was determined to reform the imperial court, also restrained himself from using philtres. Once he smelled an odd aroma when he was working in a side hall. Upon inquiry, he learnt that the fragrance came from a philtre hidden in the palace, and he ordered his men to destroy all the drug and nobody was allowed to make them again.

Love Affairs in the Forbidden City

After the Qing Dynasty took over, the emperors were diligent in ruling. The emperors were not as sexually rampant as those in the previous dynasty. They had

1. Pear blossoms in Chengqiangong Hall.
2. The night scene of a watchtower

beautiful concubines too, but their priority remained the security of their administration.

Emperor Tongzhi (1862-1874) took the throne at six. Throughout his reign, the power was held in the hands of his mother, Empress Dowager Cixi. Being a puppet emperor, he turned his interest from state affairs to indulging pleasure in wanton abandonment. One of his ministers further lured him with various stimulating supplements. The emperor, not only promoted him from fifth class to second class in return, but also gave him special permission to visit the inner palace freely.

The Eunuchs

The inner palace was where the emperor and his empress, concubines and numerous maids lived, and eunuchs were the ideal candidates to help managing such a huge family unit. It was because eunuchs could serve as excellent menservants without the threat of the ordinary male.

In spite of this, castration robbed the dignity of eunuchs, and it even left them with severe emotional scars. Deprived of life, some might take advantage of their connection with the royal family members and seek revenge. For instance, Wei Zhongxian was once a cook favoured by Emperor Xizong (1621-1627). With the help of the emperor's nanny, he received many promotions. He persecuted and murdered several imperial concubines under a false command of the emperor at one time. Wei even plotted the murder of the empress. He later used his power to build a huge tomb for himself at Biyun Temple, a Buddhist establishment

1. One of the palace gates
2. A watchtower in shadows

constructed in the Yuan Dynasty (1206-1368).

The majority of the eunuchs, however, had to live in deep fear and shame because they knew that to serve an emperor was treacherous. Any minor infraction in words or action would bring punishment or death. Even Wei Zhongxian had a tragic ending too. He was driven out of the palace as soon as the new emperor took the throne. Even though he hanged himself on his way to exile, but his corpse was torn by five horses running in different directions and his head was displayed in public, leaving his luxurious tomb sitting empty.

In 1924, Puyi, the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty, was driven out of the Forbidden City and all the eunuchs were finally freed. It was the end of the eunuch era in Chinese history.

Eunuchs and Imperial Maids

Though both eunuchs and imperial maids were slaves, to a certain degree, the destiny of the maids was in the hands of the eunuchs. Because when a maid offended her master, eunuchs were the ones to punish her. One of the punishments was to have the maid's exposed and clubbed

1. The palace of clocks
2. A palace gate
3. Side steps at the Hall of Central Harmony (Zhonghedian)
4. Stone lions on both sides of Xihemen Gate

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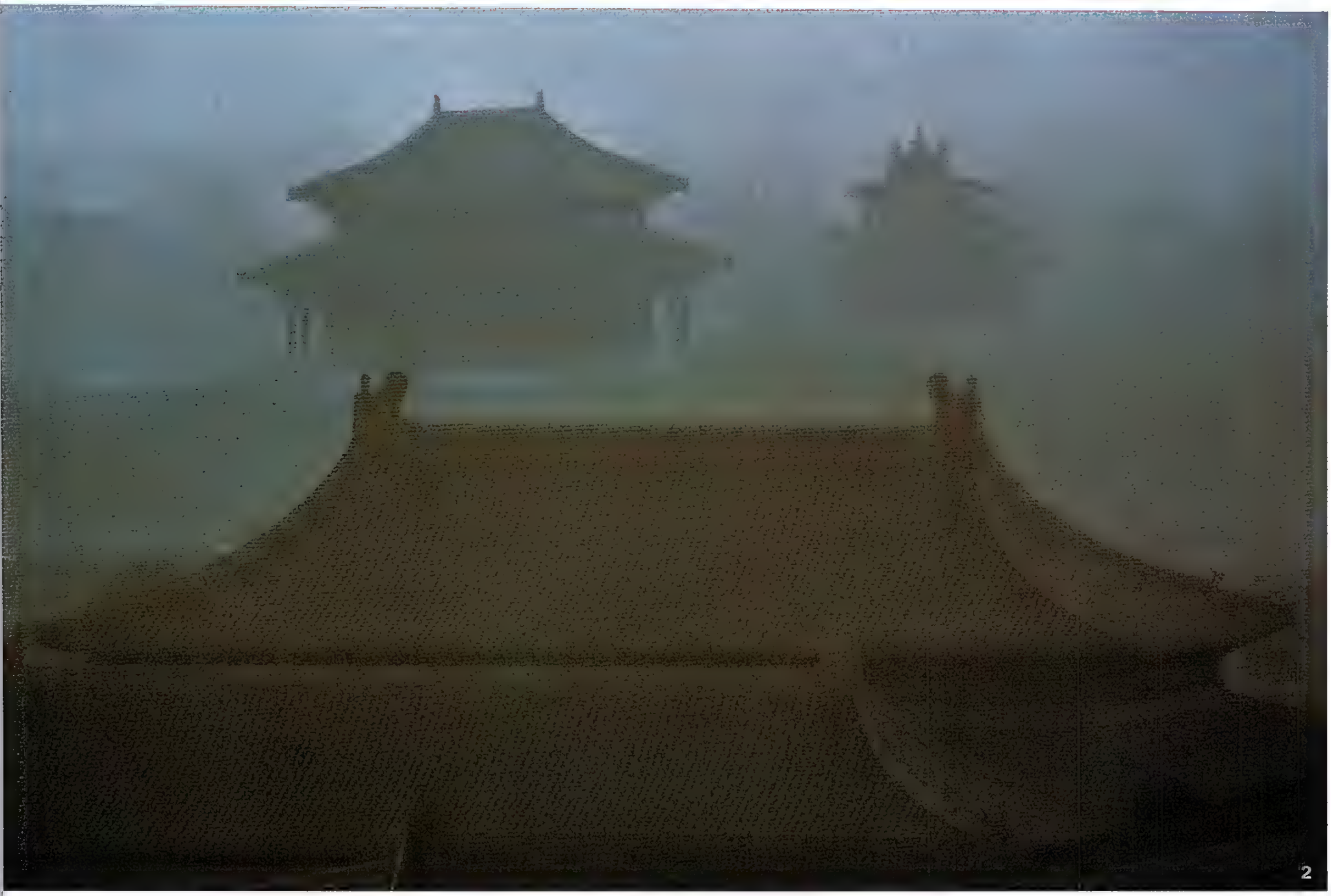
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in public. To avoid such terrible humiliation, the maid had to plead mercy from the eunuchs. Such power over the maids gave the eunuchs some satisfaction. However, once a maid became a concubine of the emperor, she would then become the master of the eunuchs, who, in turn, had to serve her carefully. Otherwise, she could very likely to punish them in revenge.

1. The lane leading to the west inner palace
2. The Forbidden City veiled in mists.
3. A portrait of ancient beauty

Forbidden Love in the Palace

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Once upon a time, a poet picked up a fallen red leaf with a poem written on it outside the palace:

"Why does the river run so rapidly?
Since my days in the palace are so idle,
I pick this red leaf and set it free,
Hoping someday I can just be free."

The poet later married a woman who had been driven out of the palace, and it turned out that she was the one who wrote the poem. The story moved many romantic young men, who wished that they, too, could encounter a girl with such passion.

The tale might be genuine, for there were red leaves, handkerchiefs and embroidered shoes floating on the inner and outer Jinshui River. But in reality, few of the palace maids would be fortunate enough to find true love. The men in the palace, like the emperor and princes, were actually far beyond reach. When they could no longer bear the endless desolation, some would turn to eunuchs for comfort.

When a palace maid took a eunuch as lover, their relationship was called "duishi". And duishi was not much different from formal marriage. If the partner died, the widow or widower would remain single and refuse to marry again, a practice kept by many husbands and wives at that time.

Jealousy among eunuchs and maids were common. During the Ming Dynasty, a maid took a eunuch to be her lover, but she later took interest in a eunuch minister. Her former lover was so devastated that he left the palace and became a monk. There was another similar tale, which actually involved the emperor to settle the disputes between his two favourite eunuchs.

Remarks of the Author:

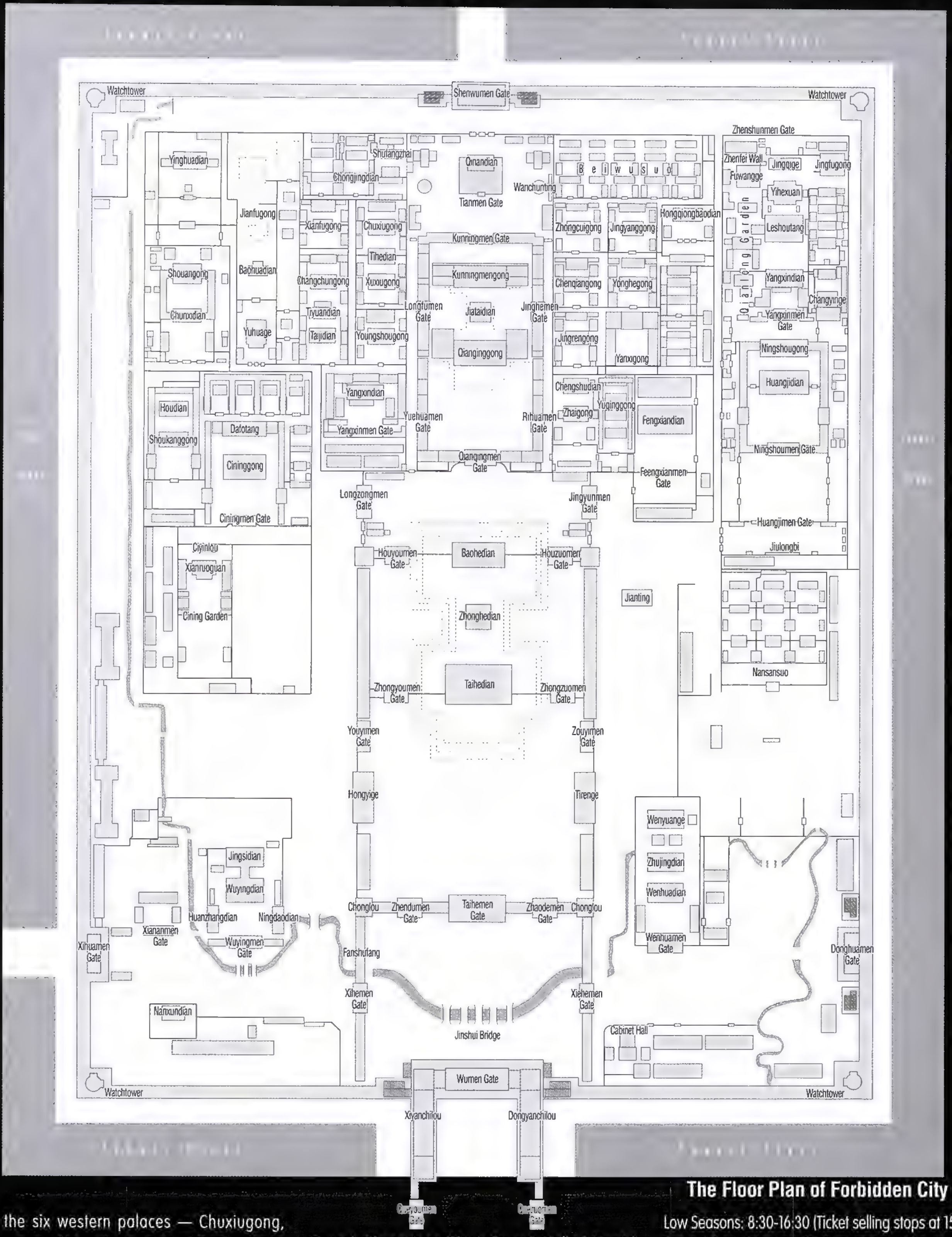
To find yourself truly immersed in the Forbidden City, don't just stroll through the palace. Should you use not only your eyes, but also your heart. Keep searching and feeling. Find out about the many secrets and mysteries that are buried inside and outside the red walls. Discover the essence of the past glory of the palace and its boundless charm.

Travel Tips

For visitors who want to learn more about the Forbidden City (Palace Museum), the best route is to cross the outer Jinshui Bridge, pass through the gates of Tian'anmen and Duanmen Gate to reach Wumen Gate.

Inside the Forbidden City, you should follow the central axis to see the inner Jinshui Bridge, Taihemen Gate, Hall of Supreme Harmony Square, the Hall of Supreme Harmony, Hall of Central Harmony, Hall of Preserving Harmony, Qianqingmen Gate, Palace of Heavenly Purity, Hall of Union, Palace of Earthly Tranquillity and the Imperial Garden.

From the left gate of the garden, you can



The Floor Plan of Forbidden City

enter the six western palaces — Chuxiugong, Xuxiugong, Yongshougong, Xianfugong, changchungong and Taijidian. Get out from the right gate to return to the square in front of Qianqingmen Gate before you turn to the east to enter the left gate to visit the eastern six palaces, Yanxigong, Yonghegong, Jingyanggong, Chenqiangong and Zhongcuigong (Clock Palace).

Again, return to the square at Qianqingmen Gate and from Jingyunmen Gate in the east, you enter Xiqingmen Gate and Huangjimen Gate to see the sites of Huangjidian, Ningshougong, Banxilou (Theatre Tower), Changyinge (Music Tower), Hall of Mental Cultivation, Qianlong Garden and Zhenfei Well. Through Zhenshunmen Gate, you can walk to the west to leave the palace from Shenwumen Gate.

In addition, you can enter the Jingshan Park crossing the street and climb up to the Wanshouting Pavilion at its top. There, you'll be rewarded with the panorama of the Forbidden City and the broad view of urban Beijing.

Opening time:

High seasons: 8:30-17:00 (Ticket selling stops at 16:00); Low Seasons: 8:30-16:30 (Ticket selling stops at 15:30).

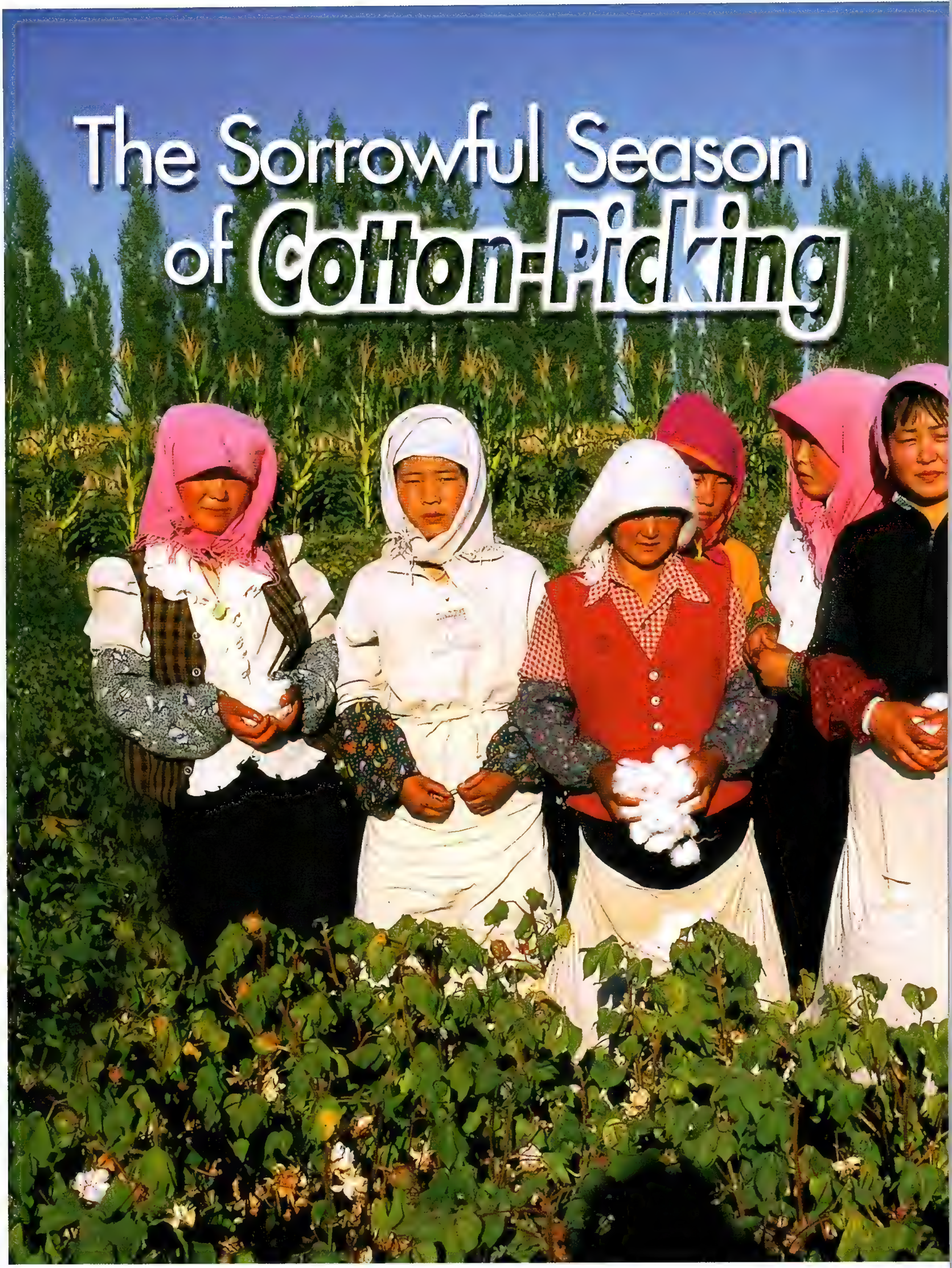
Entry ticket: 60 yuan (high season), 40 yuan (low season);

Ticket office: Wumen Square; Tel: (10) 6513 2255.

Tour guide recorder: Available in five languages, including Chinese, English, Japanese, French and Korean. You can rent one at the ticket office in Wumen Square and return it at the gift shop at Shenwumen Gate. The rental fee is 20 yuan, with a deposit of 200 yuan.

Note: You must leave your bags at the gate if they are too big.

The Sorrowful Season of Cotton-Picking



In order to make a living, hundred of thousands of women from Gansu, Shaanxi, Henan, Sichuan and some other provinces would leave their homes in summer, to pick cotton in Tianshan Mountains of Xinjiang, the northwest border area of China.

They would travel several thousand kilometres by train, wake up early in the morning, and stoop down in fields to pick the snow-white cotton. They need to work under the scorching sun of September, till the cool wind of November comes. When snow begins to fall, they would go back home, pocketing the money earned with their sweat.

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Last summer, I personally experienced the life of these cotton-picking women, who worked in Xinjiang from the end of August until early September. They were not here to visit the Silk Road, the Heavenly Pond or the bazaar, but to earn money to support their families.

Huge Crowds Rushing to the West

When I was in the Xi'an Railway Station on August 28 of 2003, there were additional trains going to Urumqi from Chongqing, Zhengzhou, Shangqiu, Xi'an, Tianshui and Lanzhou. I bought a ticket and squeezed into the waiting room. It was a surprise to learn that some passengers were from far away provinces such as Hebei, Sichuan and Henan, and they had to change train here to Urumqi. More than 90% of the passengers were young and middle-aged women.

The train I took was from Chongqing to Urumqi, and I found that half of the passengers were going to pick cotton. Opposite my seat were three couples of mid 30s from Chongqing. One of the men told me that they were going to have a strenuous journey, first stop at Urumqi, then changed train to Korla and then to Aksu, their final destination. It was their first time to Xinjiang. Before leaving, they figured that each would spend more than 1,000 yuan for the round trip train tickets. However, they might not be able to earn that amount if they stayed just for three months of picking cotton. So they planned to stay in Xinjiang for two to three years, doing some business such as opening a restaurant. They hoped to return home with 20,000-30,000 yuan. Of course, it would be much less risky to work in the cotton plantation since the farms were short of labour.

The train arrived at Tianshui at about seven in the evening. I walked out of the station and caught sight of more than 1,000 people gathering in the square. A woman in front of me said that she had been waiting here for two days. At first, she

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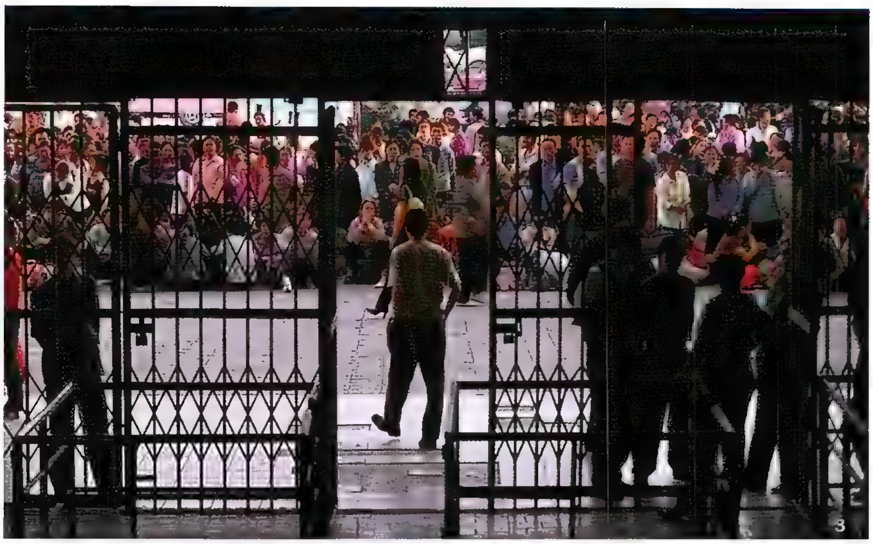
could not get a ticket. But after buying the ticket, she could not get on the train because there were too many people going to Xinjiang.

In the afternoon of August 29, it started to rain heavily. Some women came in the station for shelter. After unloading their baggage from the bus, they rushed into the waiting room. At about 8:30 p.m., the station officials urged people to line up and get on the train. The carriage was stuffed with passengers and their baggage, with half of the passengers standing in the aisle.

Almost 80% of the people on the train were on their first trip away from home. Women coming from the same place always grouped together and blocked the aisles. The train attendants repeatedly told them that there was more room at the end of the carriages, but they preferred to stay together nonetheless. From their eyes I could see that they were worried about going to such a remote place, and forming a tight group offered comfort.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Two Days and Nights of Suffering

The train arrived at Zhangye at dawn the next day. Many people were selling food, drinks, fruit, noodles, rice and sweet corn on the platform. Some passengers stuck their heads out of the window to buy food. One woman bought a pack of noodle but she asked for four pairs of chopsticks. She explained that the money was pooled by several people and they would all be sharing. Too bad the peddler would have none of that.

About four in the afternoon, I started to squeeze through all the 16 carriages, which took me nearly two hours. Along the train, I saw some children, from six-month-old to three or four years old, were heading for Xinjiang as well. Since the carriages

Previous page:
Each of the cotton pickers has her share of sad tales.

1. **Since the carriages were seriously overloaded, some passengers had to lie on the luggage racks and even under the seats.**
2. **People were excited to arrive at Urumqi after an exhausting trip of two days.**
3. **Waiting to get on the train**
4. **Every carriage was jam-packed.**
5. **Women cotton pickers worked much faster than men.**

Cotton of Xinjiang

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Cotton of Xinjiang not only ranks first in quality all over the world, but also accounts for 8% of the total output of the world. It is said that 60% of the counties in Xinjiang are planting cotton, including Aksu, Kashi and Korla in southern Xinjiang, and Shihezi, Changji and Usu in northern Xinjiang.

Xinjiang farmers use machines to plant cotton, but cotton can only be picked manually. It should also be picked as soon as ripening; otherwise, the cotton bolls accumulated on the field will affect the next harvest. In addition, Xinjiang sometimes has frost and snow in October, which have a fatal influence on the quality of cotton.

Since Xinjiang is a wide but sparsely populated area, there is not enough labours. In the past, the government would mobilise the government staffs, workers and even students of universities and middle schools to pick cotton at the end of August and early September. Picking cotton was therefore an annual event. But nowadays, the farmers need to recruit labours from central regions. As a result, the migrated cotton picking contingent was formed gradually, and an increasing number of people are joining the trade every year.

were seriously overloaded, some young men had to lie on the luggage racks and even under the seats, sleeping soundly. Another three young men, each wearing CD earphones, found respite in their music. These men were from Henan Province, and judging from their appearances, they were much better off than people from Gansu Province.

There was neither hot nor cold water aboard, because it was an express train that would not stop at the main stations to fill up water. As a result, the sweating passengers had no water for their instant noodles. People who lived near the stations were out to sell hot water, and the amount needed for one bowl of instant noodles was about 40 cents. And the soft drinks sold at stations were too expensive for most passagers, so they had no choice but to remain hungry and thirsty.

At dawn of August 31, the train entered the border of Xinjiang. No grass and trees could be seen along the boundless Gobi desert, but there were traces of flooding. Near the railway, there was a large area of yellow muddy water. The train moved slowly in this dangerous area. It turned out that the two-hour stop in the previous night was to avoid the flood. This year, there was a lot of rain in northern China, especially in the drought-prone northwest China, yet it had not been raining for about two months in southern China. It seemed that the natural order was in chaos too.

After a while, we saw some distant snow-covered mountains. It was a nice day. The blue sky was clear with only a cotton boll-like cloud hanging on top of the mountain. Returning to the carriage again after passing through Shanshan Railway Station, the youngsters on their first trip were getting excited because they would soon arrived at their destination, ending an exhausting trip. When everyone had luggage on their backs, ready to get off the train, I told them that the train would first stop at Turpan before arriving at Urumqi in two hours. Disappointed, they calmed down gradually and unloaded their luggage. When the train arrived at Turpan station those who planned to get off there could not wait to get out, and they jumped out of the windows with the help of their partners. They all rushed to the gate of the station, and took another train to southern Xinjiang.

After the attendants cleaned out the great mess of plastic bags, bottles and husks these people left in their carriages, people from the nearby

carriages came lying down on the seats comfortably and enjoyed the spaciousness for the first time.

Nightmares in the Gobi Desert

After having lunch in the dining car, I had a chat with the head of the train crew. He told me that as the long-distance train passed through the boundless desert from Hexi Corridor to Turpan of Xinjiang, some fragile passengers might suffer from mental disturbances like paranoia or hallucination, and in the extreme case, some might even commit suicide and jump off the train.

The train finally arrived at Urmuqi Station, the end of the 3,000-km trip, at about two in the afternoon. Almost half of the people on the train got off by jumping out of the window. At the same time, the foremen cried out at the platform to gather their workers. Just then, a middle-aged woman fainted all of a sudden on the platform. Her partners supported her while the attendant rushed over to give her water. She was probably suffering from a heatstroke because of the long and tiring trip. A female attendant then took her to the nearby hospital.

The cotton pickers swarmed through the narrow exit channel, creating a tight crush. To make matters worse, the ticket checking procedure was very slow. It would be better to let the people out as soon as possible to avoid accident.

The Boundless Oasis

Together with some cotton pickers from Gansu Province, I took a long-distance bus to the Shihezi Farm to the 18th company of the 148th regiment of the production corps.

Fields of corn, cotton, sunflowers and tomatoes could be seen during the bus ride. I noticed that there was a stream of trucks loaded with tomatoes driving to Urmuqi.

After a three hours' drive, the bus stopped at a gas station. However, not a single woman was going to the washroom. I then realised that they were too timid to ask for permission. So I told the foreman that he should let the women know that it's fine to ask for washroom breaks. As soon as he finished his words, the women onboard all stood up and intended to get off at once. Just then, the driver came back and the bus started off right the way. The foreman should have asked the driver to wait, but he didn't. It was not until another hour's drive that the bus stopped to let some passengers off that the women could rush to the reeds for a relief.

Waiting Leisurely

The cotton pickers lived in houses around a square courtyard, which looked like a barrack. All the doors and windows of the thatched houses faced the open courtyard. It was a hot day, with temperature at about 30°C. I passed the courtyard and saw a young

1. **Gathering for instruction**
2. **These workers from Gansu Province claimed to be 18, but they were really 16.**
3. **Some workers need to dress in bright coloured uniform so that they could be spotted right the way.**
4. **Making embroidery shoes in their spare time**

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man standing right in the centre with his head and arms hanging low. He looked depressed and I asked him if he had done something wrong. He nodded and said, "I had stolen a bike." I was surprised to hear that he had come to such a remote place to steal a bike. It turned out that he saw a bike by the road, so he took it for a joyride. He thought that it would be ok if he put it back afterwards, because it was a common occurrence in his hometown. But the owner of the bike reported to the police and the young man was caught red-handed. He was punished by having to stand for two hours under the sun and then make a public confession. After the ordeal, the young man had a stomachache and did not feel like eating, leaving a bowl of noodle untouched. He must have been really frightened and worried about his ruined reputation.

Since all cotton pickers needed to wait for a couple of days before working, they could relax for a while. People stayed idly in their rooms, some lying on the beds, some reading magazines, while others played flutes or knitted. One woman even dyed her hair with the help of her roommates.

The Lonely Moon Festival

I got to know Yang Donghua from Gansu Province, who had been there for more than 10 days already.

Donghua told me that they came too early this year and the cotton had not been ripened yet. Although they had no work, they still had to pay for their food. She told me that it was her third year in Xinjiang. She earned 1,000 yuan the first year, but only eight hundred the second year. This time around, she was worried that she might not be able to earn enough money for the return ticket. Therefore, she tried to save every penny. Today she had a bowl of dough strips for 60 cents for lunch, and steamed bread and a bowl of vegetable soup for supper. I didn't see how she could keep healthy if she kept on eating like this.

Picking cotton is a back-breaking job and because one has to stoop over all the time. Moreover, fingers can easily cut by the thorns in the process. Wearing gloves helps to avoid the thorns, but not to ease the sore back. Therefore people sometimes work in a squatting position. Yet after a night's sleep, most people would regain energy again.

Donghua was not only worried about her parents and children at home, but also the crops in the field, which had not been harvested because of the rain. If the horsebeans, tomatoes and rapeseed got wet, her whole family would have to survive on her earning from picking cotton. But the cotton in Xinjiang was not growing well this year. This worried her so much that she tossed and turned in bed all night long, as others were slumbering.

After some time, we got to know each other better. One day she asked if she could call back home with my cell phone. I was surprised that she had a phone at home, but she clarified that it was her neighbour's. When she got through the line, she was a little excited and said loudly to her neighbour, "I am in the 18th company of Xinjiang and have not started work yet. Has the

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wheat been shelled and has the autumn harvest finished? How are my children?" "No, not yet. It is raining," her neighbour answered. "Will you please tell my husband that I'll call him at seven in the morning of August 15th. Let him wait for my call at your place. I have something to tell him."

August 15th of the lunar year was the Mid-Autumn Festival. It was a time for family reunion. In order to earn money, these women had not been at home to spend the festival and eat moon cakes together with their families for three successive years.

Family in Debt

In the evening, the cotton pickers would line up in front of the dining hall for supper. There were steamed bread and vegetable soup. Even though the food is simple, it was delicious. The workers stuck the steamed bread with their chopsticks and put their big bowl of soup on the roadside carefully. They had to eat by the roadside, though sometimes dust from the passed-by speeding motorcycles might drop into their bowls.

Another worker Yuhong told me, "This time I have to pick as much cotton as I can no matter how hard it is. My ailing father is here working hard to support the family too. I was told that women do better in cotton picking so I will show off my skill."

Yuhong also told me that travelling all the way here to pick cotton was much more difficult than she had first imagined. She cried on the train since it was so crowded and there was no water available. What was more, the local people did not let them stand in the aisles. They even cursed at her and claimed that they had chartered the carriage. Finally she had to climb up to the luggage rack and stayed still for more than 10 hours.

I also asked Yuhong what was the most difficult part of her journey. Without hesitation she said, "Those people who yelled out and cursed at us. People at the railway station urged us to get on the train just like we were cattle. And when we crossed the road in Urmuqi, the policemen also yelled at us. Likewise, the farmers here reprimanded us. Are we peasants the second-class citizens? Why do they treat rich and poor people so differently?"

Yuhong's father was 45 years old but he looked older than his age. When talked about his family, he sighed, "last year I worked in 149 Regiment and earned only about four hundred yuan after deducting train tickets and other expenses. We have 4,000 m^2 of arable land at home, and the output for 700 m^2 of land is about 100-150 kg. After deducting expenses from chemical fertiliser, pesticide, seven to nine percent of tax, we don't even have enough to eat. We have a medical debt of more than 20,000 yuan because one of my parents was paralysed for many years and died the year before last and then I got hepatitis B. So we have to come here to earn money to pay off the debt."

1. To avoid cuts from thorns, the workers' fingers were wrapped in bandages.
2. Thirst for water
3. Intensive labour
4. Lunch time

Work Started

Since the cotton farm managers worried that the cotton would ripe earlier than expected, they asked the workers coming from the inland areas to arrive ahead of time. Because once the cotton bolls were in full bloom, they had to be picked as soon as possible to avoid loss. And if the cotton were hit by frost or snow, its quality would be greatly affected.

Unfortunately, the workers were not compensated for waiting, and they were all anxious to start work.

The workers finally started to pick cotton on September 5. Although the cotton bolls were not in full bloom yet, some were already ripened. Large numbers of people swarmed into the fields and picked the cotton in a single line just like mine sweeping soldiers. Since not all the bolls were in bloom, the workers finished picking all the cotton in the farm of 70,000 m^2 after 20 minutes. Some only picked less than three kilograms of cotton and some got four kilograms at most. Then they went to another cotton field. There was a large area of ripen cotton in the centre of the field, so the workers all dashed to that area despite the warnings of the farmer, because they all wanted to pick more cotton and earn more money.

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Xinjiang has plentiful sunshine and clean air in early September, and the ultraviolet rays are strong. One morning of working in the field was enough to burn the faces of the women. After two or three days, their faces turned quite tanned. Usually the workers slowed down about noontime, as their clothes were sweat soaked.

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Since the workers got paid according to their output, they had to register how much cotton they picked every day. When the cotton was weighed, each had to say out loudly her name and at the same time the person weighing the cotton repeated the names once more. The women workers all had beautiful names of various floras. When listening to the daily report, I felt like I was in an exotic garden.

About three in the afternoon, a small tractor brought in lunch. A big plastic pail of drinking water was also delivered. Perspiring like rain for hours, the cotton pickers swarmed up to get water and then gulped it down. Water overflew from the corners of their mouths to their chins and necks.

When finished drinking, they swarmed forward to get food. Each had a steamed bread loaf, as big as two fists, and a big bowl of soup with noodle. They gulped down the food quickly because they were too hungry. After a short break under the trees, they returned to the cotton field with empty bags on their waists again.

The sun was riding high in the sky on the second day. They did not have to vie with each other because the cotton bolls were all in full bloom. They were all exhausted at sunset. Some people beat their backs constantly and some stretched their backs.

I saw Donghua in the field and asked her how much cotton she picked in one day. Wiping away the sweat with the sleeve, she told me that she picked about 50 kg. Another worker told me that she picked about

3

80 kg. Cotton production was not as good as the last two years because of the lack of rains.

I went to another vast stretch of cotton field and overheard people talking in Sichuan dialect. Although they looked thin and short, they were competent. I saw a lot of cotton-filled bags piled up on the roadside, and I was surprised to learn that it was more than 100 kg. The worker told me that she was used to working hard since she always worked in the rice fields and picked tea at home. In Sichuan Province, women were always the main labour force in the fields. Furthermore, she had brought some preserved ham from home, otherwise she would not be strong enough to handle such hard work.

Suddenly I understood why women from Sichuan always picked more cotton than women from Gansu Province. It was because Sichuan women was in better shape and had healthier diets.

4

At nightfall, cotton pickers lined up on the roadside to hand in the cotton. The trucks were fenced with iron nets, and the weighed cotton bags were thrown in. The snow-white cotton was poured into the truck and then stomped down.

A man and his two daughters emptied their bags and dragged their heavy feet back to the thatched house in the dark. They worked hard the whole day and picked 180 kg of cotton altogether, earning 90 yuan. After two months, each of them might earn about 2,000 yuan. Nevertheless, they would only earn about 1,000 yuan each after deducting food and travel expenses. Watching the receding figures of the family in the dark, I realised how difficult life could be.

Translated by Wang Zhengfen

1. Gathering cotton
2. A cotton picking worker
3. Cotton bolls like snow
4. Weighing the cotton

Fantastic Danxia Landform in Zhangye

Photos & Article by Zheng Fuxin

Taken at Nansha Gully, 30 km from the starting point of Zhangye-Sunan Highway. ▶
Camera: Canon EOS-3, 28-70mm, f11
Shooting Time: 12:00

▲ **Taken by the Liyuan River at the roadside of Zhangye-Sunan Highway, 45 km from the starting point.**
Camera: Canon EOS-3, 28-70mm, f16 Shooting Time: 18:00

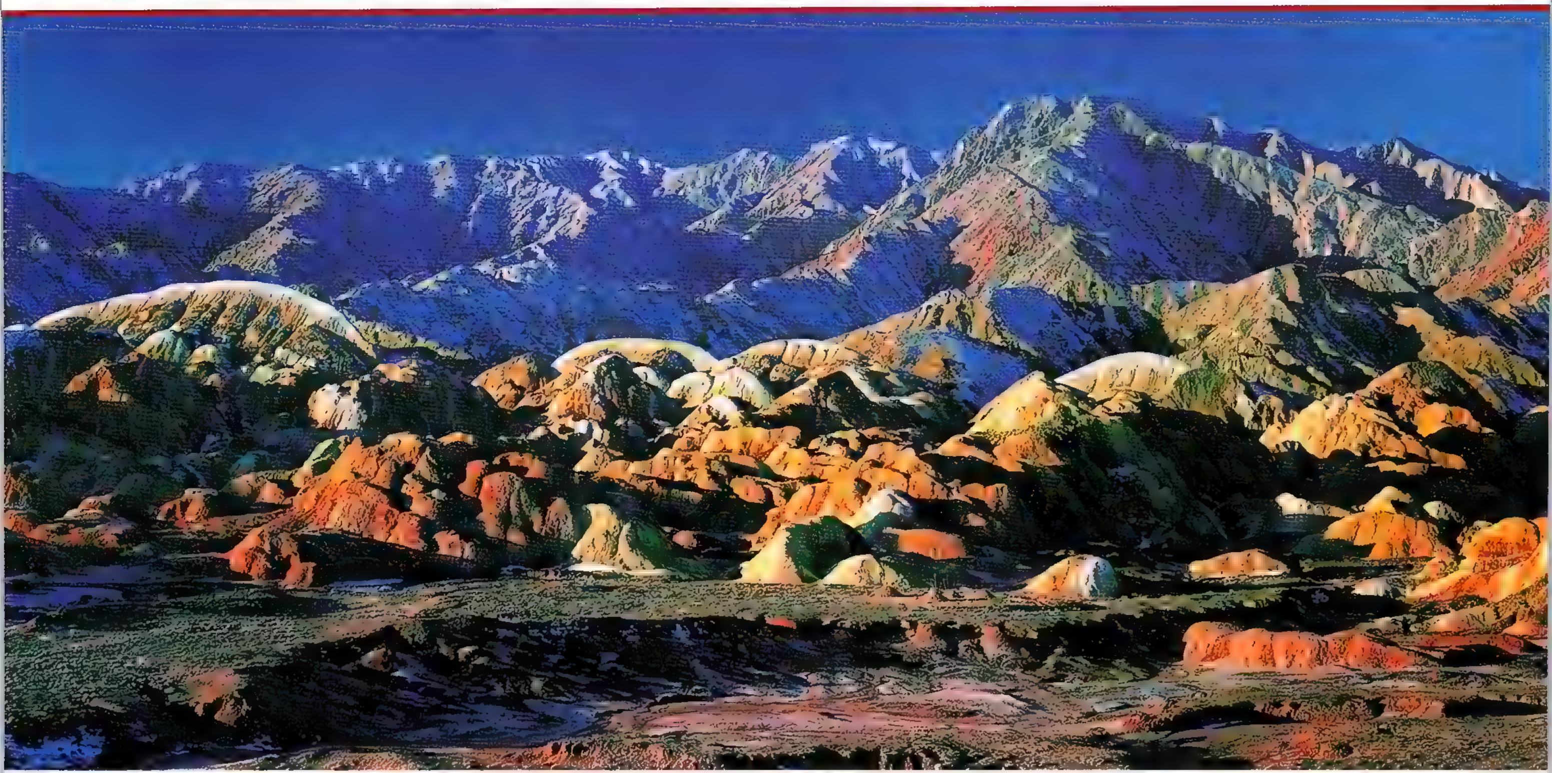
An amateur photographer in Gansu Province accidentally chanced upon a rare natural Danxia landform site. This new discovery has soon attracted the interest of travellers.

Zhangye, which is located in the central area of the Hexi Corridor and the middle section of the Qilian Mountains, has a lot of attractions: beautiful snowy mountains, glaciers, deserts, grassland and rape flowers. Apart from these, the seldom-known Danxia landform is also worth photographing.

Last autumn, I made a special photographic trip to the southern Danxia region situated on both sides of the Zhangye-Sunan Highway. It is 40 km from Zhangye City and has an elevation of 2,000-3,800 m. When I drove past the highland northeast of the Liyuan river mouth, I suddenly discovered a stunning valley to the southeast. Early next morning, I went to have a closer look. Unfolding before my eyes was a surprising

◀ **Taken at Nansha Gully, 30 km from the starting point of Zhangye-Sunan Highway.**
Camera: Canon EOS-3. 28-70mm, f11 Shooting Time: 12:00

▼ Taken atop a mountain to the south of Nantai Village, 40 km from the starting point of Zhangye-Sunan Highway.
Camera: Canon EOS-3, 28-70mm, f11 Shooting Time: 08:00 (combination of two negatives)



scene I had never heard of before.

The southern Danxia landform is most exquisite since it combines the precipices, peaks and stone pillars of the Danxia Mountain in Guangdong Province with the multicouloured yardang landform of Wucaicheng (Colourful City) in Xinjiang. The splendid sight demonstrates the superlative workmanship of nature. Probably due to the blockage of view from two adjacent mountains, the landform had escaped discovery before I arrived.

My Photographic Equipment

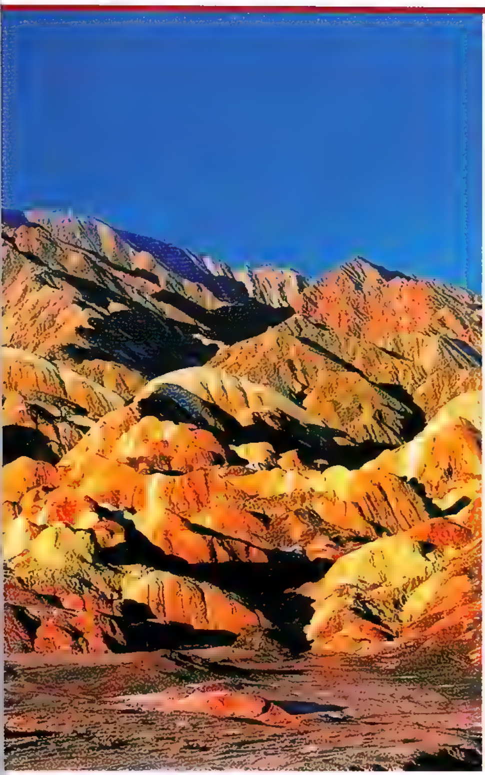
For taking such amazing epic scenes, using a more sophisticated camera is naturally the better option. However, as an amateur photographer, I used only a Canon EOS-3 camera with two Canon lenses EF 28~70 mm, f/2.8 L USM and EF 75~300mm, f/4~5.6 IS USM (with a polariser). As for camera films, I mainly used Kodak E100 VS slides, E100 negatives and Fuji 50 RVP slides.

My Experience in View Finding

For all these photos, I used the aperture of f/16~22. To express the unique character of the Danxia landform, it was better to move higher up. I set my view finding points mostly on mountain tops more than 3,000 m above sea level. In addition to the tremendous momentum and subtle gradation in colour, they turned out to have the effect of aerial photography. For convenience sake, light and handy photographic equipment would be better than large and heavy gear, for it saves you a lot of energy.

In light application, I tried my best to take advantage of the different lights and varied tones in early morning and at dusk. Unlike other natural landscapes, the Danxia landform is imbued with very rich tones of colour and is suitable for photographing at any time of the day, even at noon. All the four seasons of the year are the right time to photograph this

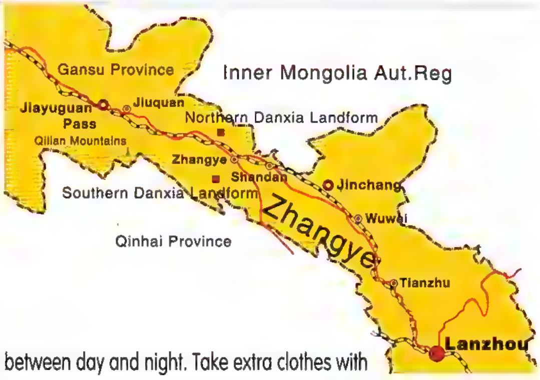
◀ Taken at Baiyin Township, Yugur Autonomous County in southern Gansu Province.
Camera: Canon EOS-3, 28-70mm, f16
Shooting Time: 15:00



Tips for Photographers

Transport:

Go by plane or train to Lanzhou in Gansu Province and then take the train, or a long distant bus the same night. You will arrive at Zhangye the following morning and can start shooting.

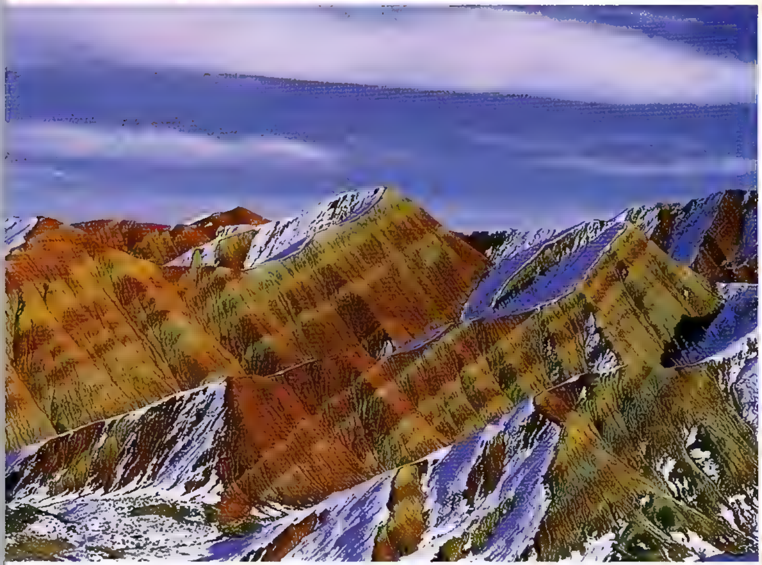


Clothing:

The temperature in Zhangye varies greatly between day and night. Take extra clothes with you in any season of the year. Woollen sweaters are a must. In winter take warm clothing. Remember to pack sun block lotion and ginseng tablets to prevent strong ultraviolet rays and fatigue due to the lack of oxygen at high altitude.

▼ **Taken at Nansha Gully, 35 km from the starting point of Zhangye-Sunan Highway. Camera: Canon EOS-3, 28-70mm, f16 Shooting Time: 17:00, the third day after a snowfall**

▼ **Taken a top a mountain to the south of Nantai Village, 40 km from the starting point of Zhangye-Sunan Highway. Camera: Canon EOS-3, 70-300mm, f16 Shooting Time: 17:00**



landform, the best season being summer, especially in July and August. In these two months, the sun shines straight on the place and shows off exceptionally distinct colours. After photographing the landform, you can shoot grasslands, snowy mountains, deserts, rape flowers as well as the folkways of the minority ethnic group Yugur.

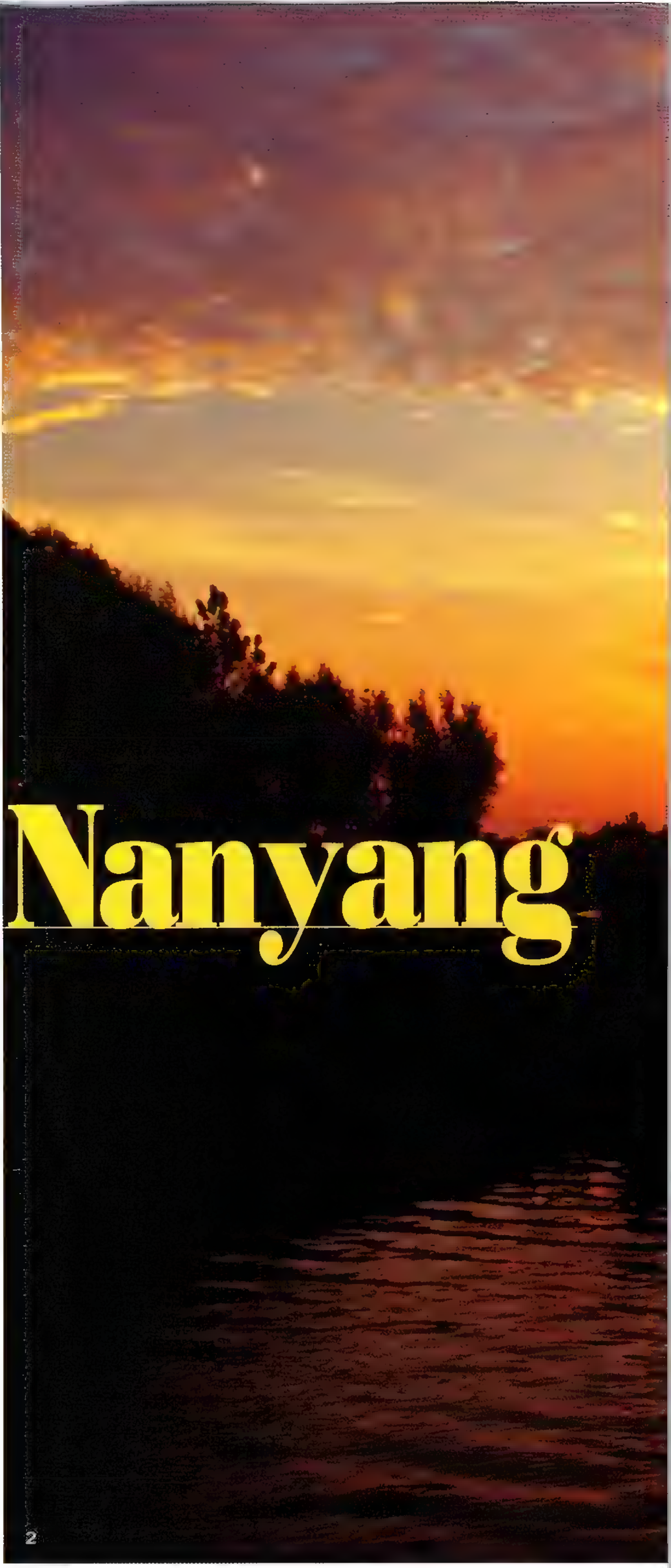
The climate in spring and autumn is temperate, but it is windy and dusty from time to time; in winter, it is very cold, but if you come across snowfalls, you will get some good pictures.

Translated by Anju K.

The Small Town by the Grand Canal Nanyang

Photos & Article Wang Bin

You may have seen a lot of tender and subtle regions of rivers and lakes in the southern China, but do you know what the northern regions look like? Nanyang Town has been one of the four famous towns along the ancient Grand Canal in east China's Shandong Province, and a prosperous business centre since the construction of the canal 700 years ago. Today's Nanyang has returned to peace and quietness from bustling trade, and its unique and enchanting scene charms tourists nonetheless.



Nanyang is situated on an island in the middle of the Weishan Lake. It stretches 3,500 m east to west and 500 m south to north. Seen in a distance, the island's narrow middle part projects outwards, making the island look like a huge pear.

Tracing History through the Ancient Town

Nanyang is surrounded by water. The ancient Grand Canal runs through the town. It is said that the Nanyang section of the Grand Canal is the only part in Shandong Province that has never been silted up. When I first visited the place, I asked the boatman where the Grand Canal was. He stared at me for a second and answered, "We've just floated through it." I was shocked to realise that the narrow, turbid and junk-filled watercourse was just the Grand Canal I had been looking for.

When the night fell, I sat alone on a small bridge. Watching the quiet Grand Canal, I imagined the busy trading boats and merchants cramming on the clear river,

women chatting while washing on the banks, and children playing in the water — the way the canal looked a couple of years ago.

1. **Rich water source and many convenient boats feature the unique town of Nanyang.**
2. **The Nanyang Lake boasts 78 kinds of fish, 209 kinds of birds, 116 kinds of hydrophytes and rich mineral resources, and it is dubbed as a profitable "treasure house".**
3. **The most attractive sight is the endless scope of wild lotus in the n northern regions of rivers and lakes.**

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Although boats and lively scenes can no longer be seen in Nanyang as time goes by, it is still endowed with natural beauty. When dawn comes, fishermen sail out on their small boats; when dusk falls, all people and animal creatures go back to their homes. Such relaxing way of life bestows people a sense of peace and happiness.

All Lanes Lead to the Grand Canal

Nanyang has a history of 2,200 years according to records. It had grown into a big village by Song Dynasty (960-1279) and gained its popularity when the Grand Canal ran through the place in 1292. By mid-Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Nanyang had become one of the four well-known towns by the Grand Canal along with Zhenjiang, Yangzhou and Xiazhen. The island was formed in Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), when floods threatened the town and land level was raised. As sea and railway transportation developed, the Grand Canal became less and less favourable and eventually stopped operation in 1901. The town began to decline since then, and the completion of the Tianjin-Pukou Railway in 1949 accelerated the fall.

In the most prosperous days, Nanyang welcomed numerous boats and shops. The following 600 years Nanyang still kept the essence of Chinese ancient culture, and temples and historical relics could still be seen. However, floods in 1937 and 1954 and the fire set by Japanese troops in 1939 destroyed most of these heritage treasures. Some of the rest were further damaged during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Today, only a few historical sites remain in town, including the Muslim temple, the flagpole and the Zhuangyuan hutong (alley).

Paved with black flagstones, the streets are very narrow. The ancient houses by the roadside, which used to be shops, were built in the Ming and Qing dynasties. The local elders told me that these houses were bought back from the Japanese army during the Japanese invasion. "Why are you taking photos? The houses are

going to be renovated soon," they wondered when seeing me set up the camera tripod.

The lanes zigzag through the irregularly located residential areas, but all of them lead to the Grand Canal. Before my visits, my friend told me that if I was lost in the lanes, just asked where the canal was. Yet like "all roads lead to Rome", one can never get lost in Nanyang.

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Row, Row, Row a Boat

Boat is an indispensable vehicle in Nanyang, which is surrounded by water of all sides. I learned from a deputy town head that Nanyang is the only town in Weishan County that has no cars, and it is one of the few such places in inland China. It is even seldom to see a bike in town, but boats can be seen everywhere. The Nanyang water transportation department estimates that there are over 10,000 boats in the town. Since Nanyang has only 20,000 residents, which means that every other person owns a boat on the average.

Although the country has built houses for the fishermen to settle down since the early 1960s, many people are still living in boats and go fishing every day. Every morning before it breaks, the fishermen start off to the lake. They know various ways of catching fish, like setting nets, baskets, birds and knocking wooden tools. Once I saw them clapping bars of wood, and the fish were frightened and knocked into the nets. But today, many old fishing means have disappeared, like forking and casing.

Every time I sit on a boat, I think about the advantage of travelling by boat. It is safer than driving on the road, and there are no traffic lights, policemen, or traffic jams in the river. It is more stable and comfortable sitting in a boat than in a car. And finally, there are no tollgates on the watercourse or bridges.

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1. **The ancient canal is still in use in Nanyang Town.**
2. **Busy entrance of the night market**
3. **Old shoe-mending worker is still doing his job.**

1

The Flourishing Night Markets

The Grand Canal connects China's five major river systems (Haihe River, Yellow River, Huaihe River, Yangtze River and Qiantang River) and runs through the most populous and prosperous regions. As its midpoint, Nanyang has been enriched with both the northern and southern cultures and traditions. But still, the town has its own custom. The people have two meals a day, which is a strange habit to non-natives. The night markets is another feature of this town.

Night markets usually open after midnight. In the past, business boats started off early and fishermen sold fish as soon as possible to keep them fresh, so the markets opened quite early. Once I went to a market before dawn. It was already crowded and flashlights were flickering everywhere. Today, many other products are on sale as well, but fish is still the most popular goods. I found the fishermen sold fish in piles, despite of species and size. It is dubbed as "a basket deal".

Ecological Deterioration Needs Attention

The Weishan Lake is believed as the "China's Lotus Capital". The best time to visit Nanyang is July and August, when thousands of hectares of wild lotus bloom and compete their beauty. However, I was worried about the ecological deterioration of the lake. Weishan Lake, the

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largest freshwater lake in the north, is receiving 710,000 tn of waste water from four neighbouring provinces every day! Fish and shrimps are dying and even disappearing in some areas, and the fishermen are having trouble to make a living.

When we were taking photos in the lanes, people often asked if we were journalists. They wanted us to report on the water pollution. Some even volunteered to take us to see the most polluted areas by their boats. Local people said that the clear water in some areas was becoming as dark as soy sauce in recent years.

I also noticed that large pieces of wetland were cleared and reclaimed to form fishponds and fields. It was sad to see that over-development of the lake area by the local people further degraded the environment in addition to the industrial pollution caused by other regions.

1. **Fading lotus on the Nanyang Lake**
2. **Every July and August is the best time to visit Nanyang and to see the beautiful wild lotus.**
3. **Fishermen are going fishing in the lake every morning.**

Travel Tips

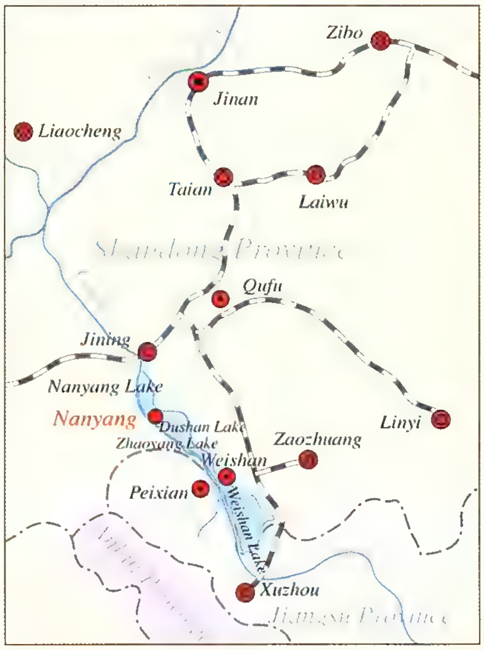
▼ **Traffic:** The Nanyang Island is a town of Weishan County of Shandong Province. There are two routes to get to this remote island:

1. Fly from Shenzhen in Guangdong Province to Xuzhou in Jiangsu Province (a shuttle airfare of 1,680 yuan*), take a Xuzhou - Jining bus to Yutai County, change the bus to East Ferry Crossing, and then arrive in Nanyang in half an hour by boat.
2. Take a train to Liangshan in Shandong Province, change to the bus to Jining (ticket sold at six yuan), then the bus to Yutai, and finally get to Nanyang by boat.

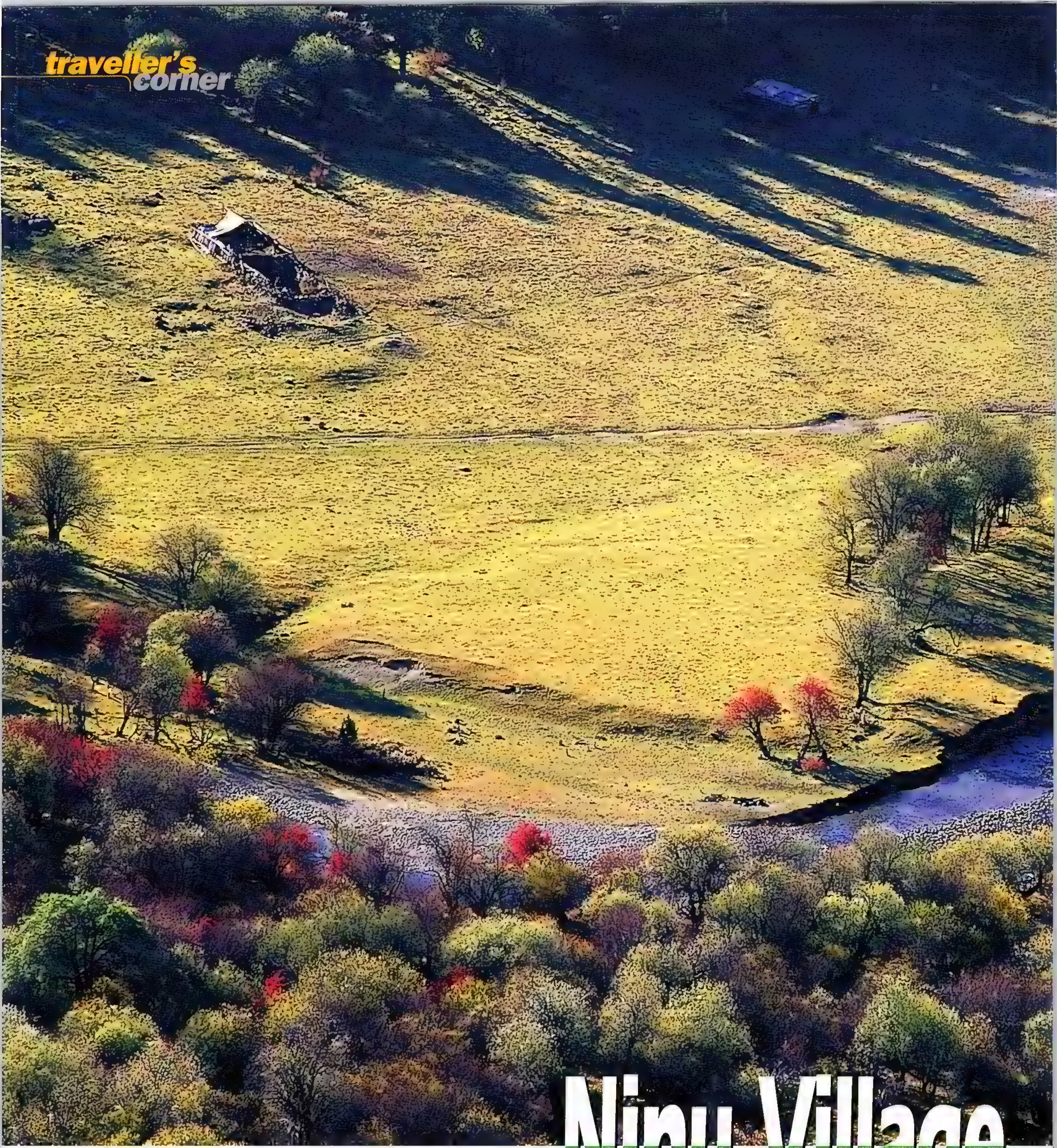
▼ **Lodging:** The Hehua Hotel (Lotus Hotel) is the only hotel in town. Telephone No: (0537) 8120001. Standard room charge: 50 yuan per day.

▼ **Suggestions:**

1. The best time to visit Nanyang is July, August and September. The best route is to visit Liangshan by train first, then go to Nanyang, and return from Xuzhou by plane.
2. There are a couple of restaurants in the town which serve tasty lake dishes. Visitors may contact the township tourist office before their trip. Telephone No. (0537) 8125898.

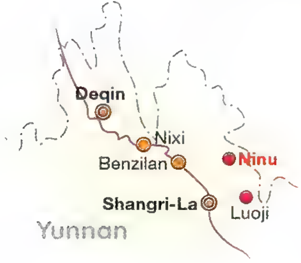


*US $1~8 yuan



A Fairyland on Mountains: Ninu Village

Photos & Article by Cao Guozhong



The village of Ninu is located in the valley between the Dividing Range of Yunnan Province and Daocheng of Sichuan Province. Covering valley troughs at 2,400 m to mountains over 4,000 m, this Tibetan village is buried deep in the mountains and it can only be accessed on horseback or by foot.

Ninu Village is situated on the banks of the Ninu River, surrounded by mountains. It is part of the Luojie District of Shangri-La County. The village has about 100 families, with a population over 600. For generations, the villagers gained their livelihood by farming and herding.

The pastures here are scattered among mountains over 3,500 m high. Merely travelling to and fro the paddocks would need 2 days. For convenience sake, the families were forced to live separately.

It was late autumn when I first set foot in Ninu, where the cold weather came early. Snow had fallen unexpectedly the day before we set off, which added challenges to my expedition. By the time we arrived at the camp, it was dusk already. The colour of the sunset painted the endless snowfields a translucent crimson. The reflections from the snow turned everything into a stunning ruby.

I felt my breath catch in my throat at this wondrous vista: the chimney smoke wafting upwards from the hut above the snowfields, pristine snow with neat footprints of horses, and the pearly round moon ascending quietly above the mountain silhouette.

Falling Ill in the Fairytale Land

The next morning, the weather was clear and fine. We crossed the snowfields and entered the dense virgin forests, and took the down hill path along the stream. We crushed thick layers of leaves underfoot as we walked along the forest paths that led us back to Ninu village by sunset.

1. Ninu farms are like fairytale lands.
2. All Ninu villagers keep sheep — most of their personal belongings are made from wool.

By a stroke of bad luck, I caught a cold and became victim to a stubborn fever. Since Ninu was unequipped to deal with my ailment, we had to leave immediately. Thankfully we ran into the horse-drawn caravans who took me back on horseback, but I was swaying in my sickness and sighing with regret.

Ninu Again

I was back to Ninu later in autumn again. The pastures were snow-covered during my first visit but everything was different this time. Cattle and sheep grazed leisurely under the blue sky dotted with fluffy clouds. The pleasant tunes of the herders could be heard. Wafts of smoke drifted above herders' huts. Patched of golden and scarlet leaves could be seen on the distant mountains.

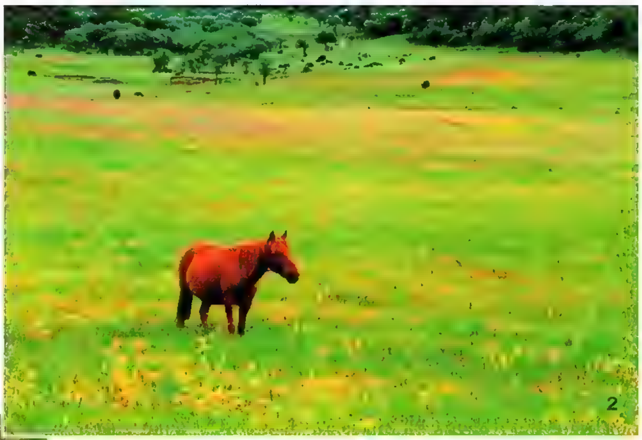
We left the 2,400 m high Ninu village, spent a day crossing the dense virgin forests and mountain streams, to reach the 3,800 m high pass. A wide prairie, the Nabao pastureland, appeared before us. Sheep and cattle were grazing here and the gently rolling paddocks were dotted with a few wooden huts. Distant herders moving around were marked by their distinguished red headscarves.

Nearby is Nabao Lake, which the locals regard as the Sacred Lake. Ninu natives would put their hands together in the traditional Buddhist gesture of respect upon seeing the Sacred Lake. Nabao Lake is one of the sources of the Ninu River, its own waters stem from a 4,000 m high mountain nearby.

We bedded down for the night in the low-roofed wooden huts of the herders. These cabins were made of logs and the roof was just wooden planks secured by stone blocks.

The Ninu Locals' Lives

What takes up most of the herders' days is milking, as each household has at least a dozen yaks, or even hundreds. As soon as dawn breaks, the herders get up to start milking, and finish the job before breakfast time. Their diet doesn't vary much from meal to meal: yak butter tea, zanba bread (made from highland barley flour), cheese and yogurt. Occasionally, the cuisine is supplemented by rice and meat. After breakfast, they start making yak butter from milk. Usually fresh milk is considered too good for straight drinking, but to treat guests from afar, the herders generously offered us fresh milk from the yaks.



Horses are an indispensable part of Ninu people's lives. They love horses and each family owns several. Horses are the only means of transportation between villages, ranches and towns. Even though every family has horses, there is still a horse-drawn caravan team. This team is in charge of taking villagers' goods into cities for sale. They usually bring back salt, tea or other items. Villagers can therefore save 2-days of travel.

Since cattle and sheep don't require herding, the

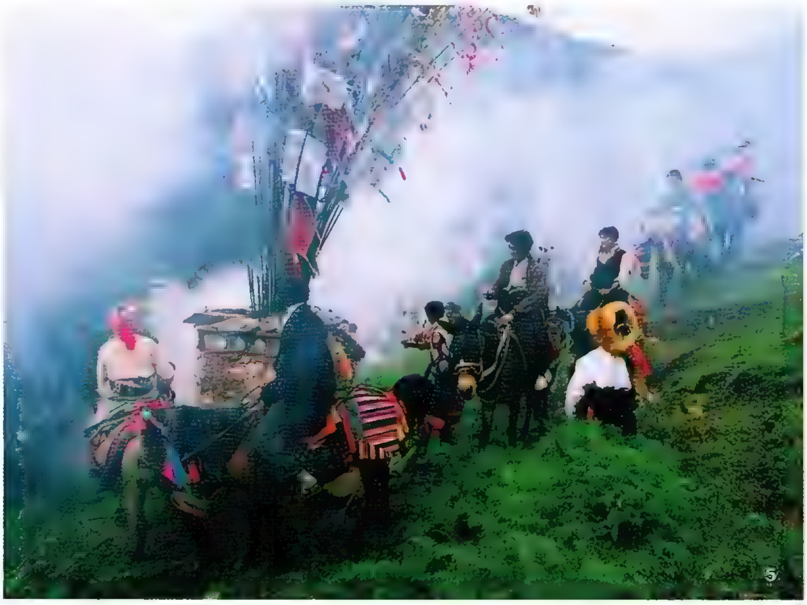
women have relatively light workloads. We often saw them spooling wool or knitting rugs with the children. While kids here have never tasted highly processed snacks such as chocolates, played computer games or even ridden a car, they can embrace endless blue sky, vast pastures, herds of cattle and sheep, as well as their local Tibetan mastiff.

Just in time for the Danba Festival

During our stay in Ninu, we chanced upon the Danba Festival. The aged village chief told us that "Danba" means July in Tibetan, and every year on the 15th of July in the lunar calendar, the village holds celebrations for this important date. On this special occasion, the grains are grown and the animals fattened up. It's a time to celebrate a good harvest.

On the day of the festival, everyone dresses in traditional Tibetan costumes and goes to the "Magical Cave" to worship the gods and sprits. They light a few yak butter lamps in a tiny cave, then burn incense and bow down to the ground in respect. Natural spring water from the cave is seen as sacred water, and the villagers would clamour for a drink or to splash on their heads. Some even fill up a bottle to take home, believing it can ward off disease and demons. Afterwards a barbeque bonfire is lit outside the cave. Considering that Ninu's only gathering is at this one ritual, the ceremony is simple but solemn, its significance is obvious.

We noticed that the villagers were resplendent in gems and jewellery, even the horses were decked out in full regalia. The whole village congregated at the foot of the magical mountain next to the village and sat on Tibetan rugs placed on the ground. They invited a "Cangba" or Tibetan priest to hold this religious ceremony, to play the drum and to chant for the village in prayer and blessings. The villagers lighted bonfires, cooked tea and warmed wines, especially the "Suolima", a home-brewed low-alcohol liquor made by fermenting cooked highland barley and had yak butter and honey added for taste.



When the horn sounded, Tibetan-attired men leaped on their horses and speeded off towards the revered mountain, free and wild like soaring eagles. Their unbridled passion of life is able to make any city dweller feel a sense of lost. In the endless pursuit of modern civilisation, many people seem to have lost touch with nature. After a few days with the innocent Ninu villagers, I found spiritual peace that is like no other. ⊆

Translated by Cheng Lei

1. **Festivities call for everyone to share home-brewed "Suolima".**
2. **Ninu horses are not large, but they are adept mountain climbers and forest navigators.**
3. **Tibetan mastiffs show their gentle and affectionate side in front of their young owners.**
4. **The highlands dressed in light snow in autumn mornings.**
5. **Amidst the incense smoke, Ninu village men ride around the horse prayer flag, signifying respect for gods.**

The Bicycle Empire

Article by Xiao Fuxing Photos by Wang Wenlan

Bicycle was invented in Scotland, but it has seen its greatest use in China. It is probably, apart from chopsticks, the most popular item in the country. Whether in the most modern city or in the remotest village, bicycle is omnipresent. This is especially true during the peak hours in big cities such as Beijing or Shanghai, when the streets are filled with waves of cyclists like no other place.

A Lifelong Companion

As a child grows up, the first thing he or she needs to learn is how to ride a bike. This is an essential first lesson in life, for the simple reason that the bike is going to be his or her lifelong companion. It carries the child to primary school, to university, to work, and sometimes to the final journey in life.

Bicycles, watches and radios used to be the three most desired commodities in China. Some of the best-known bicycle brand names were "Fei Ge" (Flying Pigeon), "Yong Jiu" (Forever) and "Feng Huang" (Phoenix). A bicycle, instead of jewellery, was an important and eye-catching dowry in the past. Very often it was the most valuable possession and an inseparable member of the household.

Impromptu Stunt

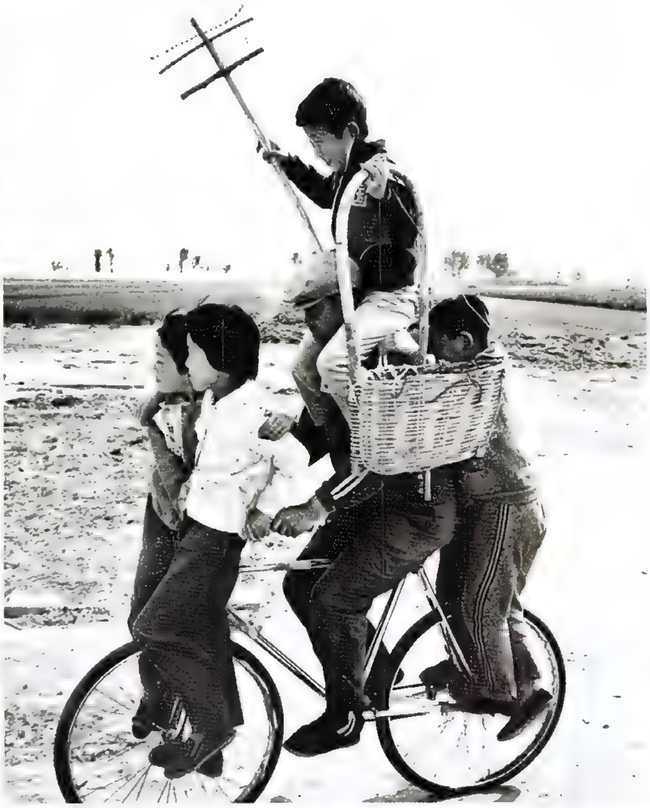
Most narrow alleys between houses are usually only wide enough for one person to squeeze through. In the late afternoon, one can often see people coming home from work, pushing their bikes awkwardly through these alleys, most likely with a child on the back seat and grocery in the front basket.

Life in the village, on the other hand, is a bit different from the urban scene. Farmers also ride bikes, but they are much more relaxed. Their bike is fastened with harness, and they let their animal ambles along leisurely as they ride into the sunset. The rural children are equally merry. They would all pile upon one bike after coming home from school, laughing and jostling as if performing a stunt.

A Two-wheeled Lorry

Bicycle is the most common means of transport. A bike is like a modern-day donkey that is made to shoulder all the family burdens. In the countryside, bicycles probably have more use than the trusty old bull and the hardy donkey. They carry vegetables, cereal, baskets and everything that is to be sold in town.

To ensure the bike is loaded to the max, people often carry a long pole with many different "props" for balance, be it the baskets, bamboo chairs, children....

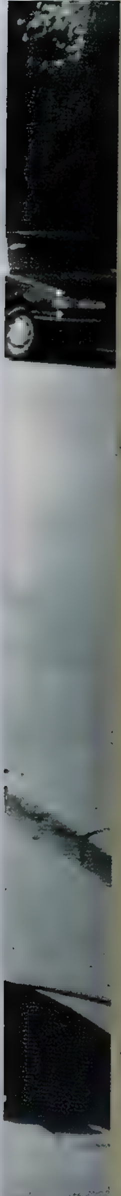


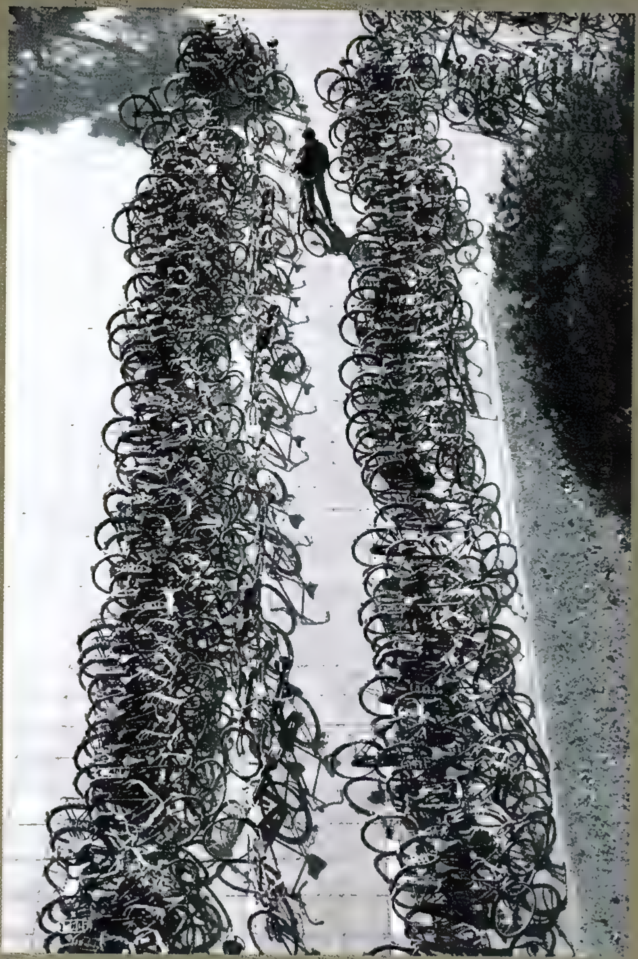
Conjoined Twins

Apart from farm produces, city bikes carry more delicate items than country bikes. They are useful even when immobile, for they can double as a fresh flower stall or newspaper kiosk.

Taking a pillion passenger by bike used to be very popular since it is more convenient and cheaper than taking a taxi. But most important of all, intimate lovers can travel like conjoured twins which cannot be experienced otherwise.

Once, I saw a young couple on a bike. It was a windy day, so the man had to bend low to ride, while the girl, in traditional cheongsam and her varnished toes in sandals, was casually riding side ways and not even hanging onto the man. It must have taken them lots of practice to be able to do this.





A Mobile Rocking Chair

Pillion passengers are usually children taken to schools or nurseries. This is a very common sight in Chinese cities. But different areas have different ways in doing so. In the south, children are strapped upright onto the back of the adults, like guardian angels. In the north, children are tucked in front like pampered chickens. Children often fall asleep in bike rides, with their bodies slanted and heads dangled in a seemingly precarious position, prompting passers-by to shout out warnings.

◆

The Family Car

◆

In the south, pillion passengers are allowed whereas they are prohibited in the north. More than 20 years ago when I had just been accepted into the Central Drama College, I gave a ride to a fellow student in my bike and was stopped by a policeman. Intending to fine us, he demanded to know where we came from. I mumbled my answer. He misheard that we were studying traditional Chinese opera instead of drama, softened up and let us go. The police must have been an opera fan.

A bicycle's capacity can easily be tripled. Simply tuck the child in the front, seat another adult behind and voila! You will have your intimate family car.

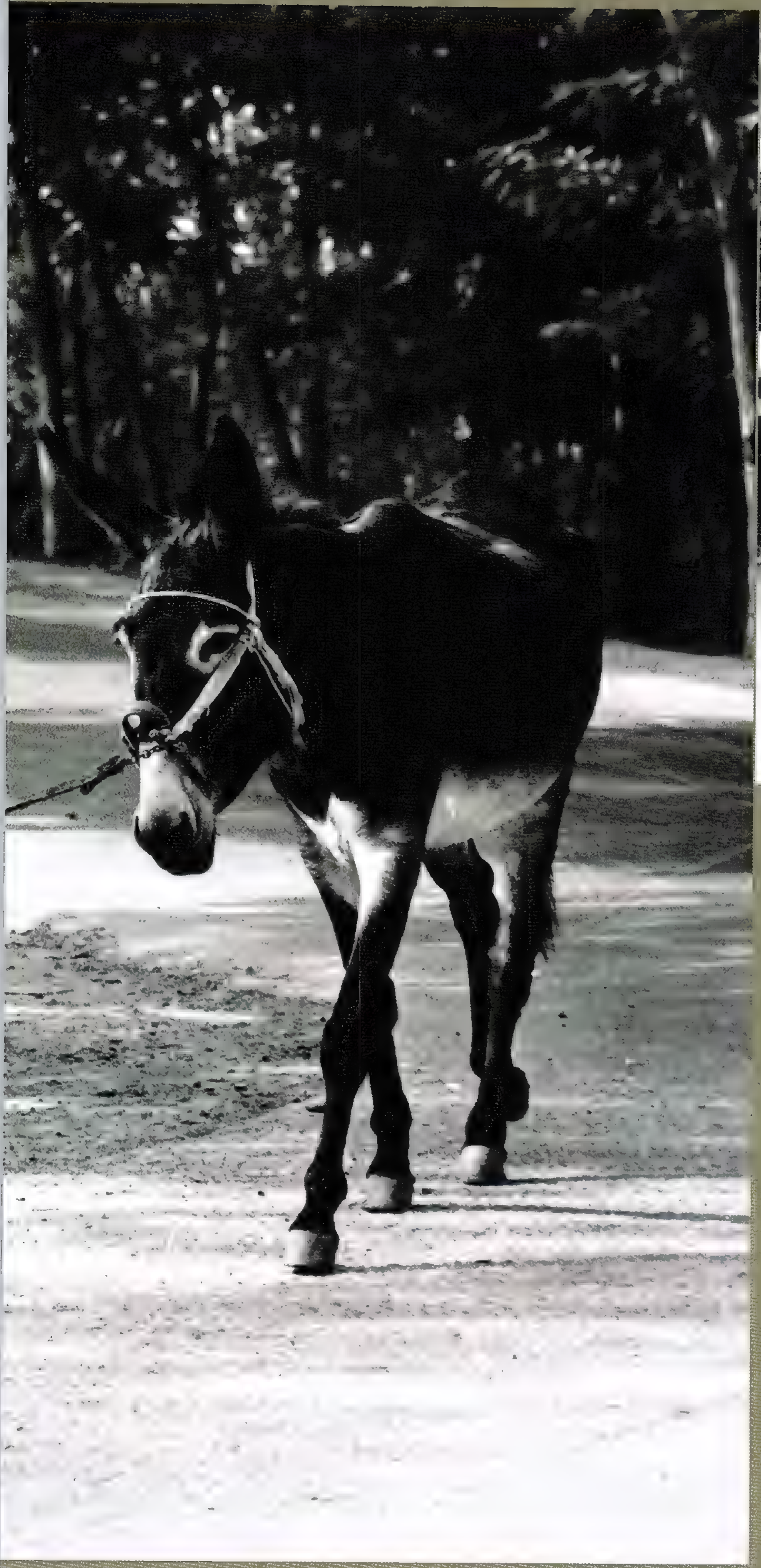
An Outlet for Energy

During daytime, a bike is just a machine that takes children to school. But as the sun sets, it turns into an radical equipment for sports and pleasure. Evenings are play times for kids who make use of any slope on the road to practice their freestyle riding. To them, the road is one big punching bag. Urged on by the cheers and jeers of the crowd, they play till late into the night before going home exhausted to their grumpy parents.

One of the problems that city cyclists face is finding a parking place. In the jam-packed metropolis, any decent space is taken up by cars while alleys and passages are filled with junks and bicycles. Thus, Some people drag their bikes up the apartment stairs and bind them to the railings. Some even hang their bikes from the ceiling, like air-dried meat. It can be mighty inconvenient and scary when entering this "bike zone" during a blackout.

One of the most feared crimes of city dwellers is having their bikes stolen. The problem is that there is no way to keep the bikes secure despite better locks. The newer the bike, the faster it is gone.

People have been so accustomed to this that they don't even bother reporting to the police. Some just buy a new one. Others get a second-hand one that may very well be a stolen bike. Such vicious cycle merely creates an increasingly bigger second-hand market.



Lost and Found

I lost my bike once. After spending lots of time looking for it I gave up. Two years later, when I had almost forgotten all about it, I decided to move to a new place. As I cleaned up the area in front of my place, my neighbour, an old man, asked me if he could park his bike here to avoid bicycle thieves. He had lost a couple of bikes already. When he brought his bicycle up, I was surprised to find that it resembled my lost bike very much, including all the markings. My neighbour noticed my concern over the bike and awkwardly asked if I found the bike familiar. He then admitted that this was a stolen bike. Two years age, he was so frustrated when his bike was stolen that he simply picked one in the bicycle lot, broke the lock and took it away. He was very ashamed and was willing to return the bike to me. But I was as embarrassed as he was, so I told him a white lie and let him go.

Translated by Megina Kwan

CHINA TOURISM
THE SORROWFUL SEASON OF COTTON-PICKING
THE BICYCLE EMPIRE
FANTASTIC DANXIA LANDFORM IN ZHANGYE
THE INVISIBLE FORBIDDEN CITY
289

Readership Survey

China Tourism always appreciates feedback from its readers. In accordance with your suggestions, we have recently added a variety of new columns. Still, we need to know more of your opinions, including criticisms and suggestions. Please take a couple of minutes to complete this questionnaire and return it to us. Thank you!

Please give your evaluation of the stories in this issue and your overall impression of *China Tourism*.

	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
The Invisible Forbidden City	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The Small Town of Nanyang	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Danxia Landform in Zhangye	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The Bicycle Empire	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The Season of Cotton-Picking	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Others:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
Photographs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cover	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Articles	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Travel Tips	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Art Design	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Other Opinions: ______________________________

____

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What are your suggestions for improvement?

____

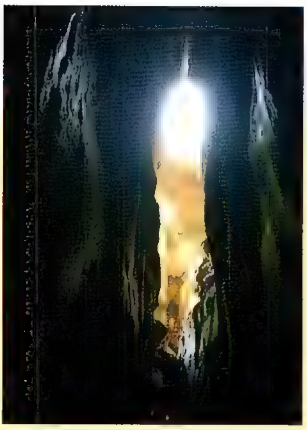
Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire. It provides us with invaluable feedback which will help us improve *China Tourism* magazine for you.

*Please mail this questionnaire to our office at 24/F, Westlands Centre, 20 Westlands Road, Quarry Bay, Hong Kong, or fax to (852) 2561 8196.

HIGHLIGHTS OF ISSUE NO. 290

Feature Story: Thrilling Adventures

Searching for thrills of the lifetime? Look no further!



Life in Dark Caves

Exploring the unknown world in totally dark caves may overwhelm most people; yet, to cave-exploring lovers, the caves are full of wonder, surprise and the promise of achievement. Caves in China are mostly found in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Guizhou, Yunnan and Sichuan provinces in the south, where there is a wide distribution of karst topography with high mountains and low valleys.

Life and Death in Motuo

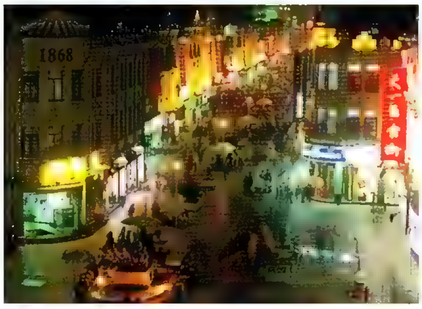
Through the Yunnan-Tibetan and Sichuan-Tibetan highways, I arrived at Bomi last September. There, I met another solitary backpacker, and we agreed to travel together to Motuo. And from there on, we drove into the ill-lighted indigenous forest launching our life and death journey to Motuo.

White Water Rafting in Yunnan

The adventure took me 230 thrilling kilometres from the lower reaches of Tiger Leaping Gorge to Jin'an Bridge. But death traps were waiting for me around the corner, for this was Class V river rafting.

A Pilgrimage Trip to the Meili Snow Mountains

Every time I go to Tibet I always meet some pilgrims travelling on foot. They go bravely forward to the sacred mountains while constantly turning the prayer wheels and chanting incantation. This time it was just the major pilgrimage to the Meili Snow Mountains for the Year of Water Sheep, which appeared once every sixty years in Tibet calendar, and I decided to join the trip.

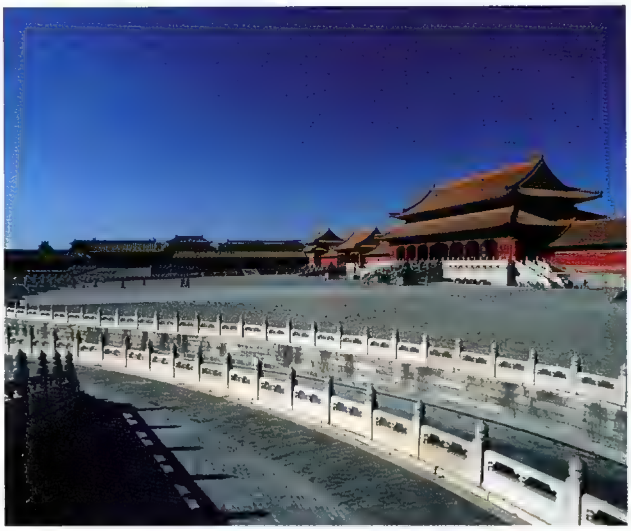


City Snap:

Wenzhou—from Water Town to Metropolis

Situated on the south-eastern coast of Zhejiang Province, Wenzhou is blessed with a mild climate all year round. Built over 1,600 years ago, the city was was crisscrossed by rivers and canals in its earlier days. Residents there commuted mainly by boat, but as population continuously grew, almost all the waterways were reclaimed by the end of the 70s.

BITS AND PIECES ABOUT THE FORBIDDEN CITY



The Forbidden City, also known as the Imperial Palace or Palace Museum, situated in central Beijing, was the power centre of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties from 1420 to 1912. The vast palace was called "forbidden" because the general public had no access to it until the overthrow of the last emperor (1924).

The construction of the palace took 14 years and it was completed in 1420. This complex of 999 buildings with a total of 9999 rooms was believed to be auspicious since the number nine in Chinese is synonym to long lasting. The Imperial Palace was the location for the throne for 14 Ming dynasty emperors and 10 Qing dynasty emperors. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the palace caught fire several times but was reconstructed and expanded later.

Following the Republican Revolution of 1911, the new provisional government at Nanjing struck an agreement with the Qing royalties, guaranteeing that after the last emperor (Aisin Giorro PuYi) abdicated, the huge royal family could continue to live in the Forbidden City on a stipend equivalent to four million US dollars a year. In addition, the family would be granted ownership of the great art treasures that had been collected by previous emperors.

Emperor Pu Yi continued to live in the palace until 1924, when a warlord evicted him and forced him to escape to Tianjin. In 1925, the Forbidden City became a public cultural and historical museum that it now attracts over 7 million visitors annually.

Combining all the classical patterns of the ancient Chinese architecture, the Forbidden City represents the highest achievement in the ancient Chinese architecture and engineering. The Forbidden City was put under state protection in 1961 and listed as part of the world's cultural heritage by UNESCO in 1987.

Currently, a large-scale repair project, said to be the largest of its kind since 1911, is proceeding smoothly in the Forbidden City. The repair project, designated to restore and face-lift the original look of the imperial palace, began in 2002 and is expected to be completed before the convening of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing.

MAIN ATTRACTIONS

The entire palace area, rectangular in shape and 720,000 m^2 in size, takes up one-third of the eight kilometre-long central axis of Beijing's old city proper, from the city gate of Yongdingmen on the south to the Drum and Bell Towers on the north. The harmonious assemblage of buildings displays the best characteristics of Chinese architecture — majestic style, flawless construction, and fine coordination of the whole and the parts. Today it is the most distinguished museum of Chinese art and culture.

Visitors can stroll freely through the royal garden and enter many palace buildings. They can also view displays of printings, calligraphy, bronze, jade, and other items from the vast imperial art collection which, despite pillaging by eunuchs, fire damage, and the loss of many items during the Chinese civil war from 1945-49, still numbers over one million items, accounting for one-sixth of the China's total relic items.

The size and space of the palace is exquisitely calculated according to different functions and importance. It is mainly divided into the Outer Court and Inner Court.

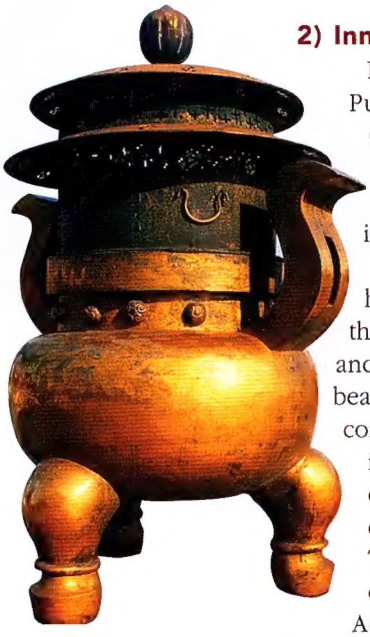
1) Outer Court

The most impressive buildings on the palace ground are the Hall of Supreme Harmony (Taihedian), Hall of Central Harmony (Zhonghedian) and Hall of Preserving Harmony (Baohedian). Viewed from afar, these palaces built on the eight-metre-high white marble foundations take on a grandeur that is almost mythological.

The Hall of Supreme Harmony, the most elegant of the three, is the place where grand ceremonies were held, such as the accession of a new emperor to the throne, the adoption of a new title of a reign, the emperor's birthday and wedding, and the celebration of the Spring Festival. It is about 30 m high, 14 m wide from east to west and 40 m from north to south and its roof is supported with 84 huge pillars, each a metre in diameter.

Six of these pillars, decorated with gold dragons, surround the throne which rests on a two-metre-high platform. There are sculptures of divine cranes, incense burners and tripods stand in front and a meticulously carved screen behind. The hall is filled with priceless gold art and jewellery on display.

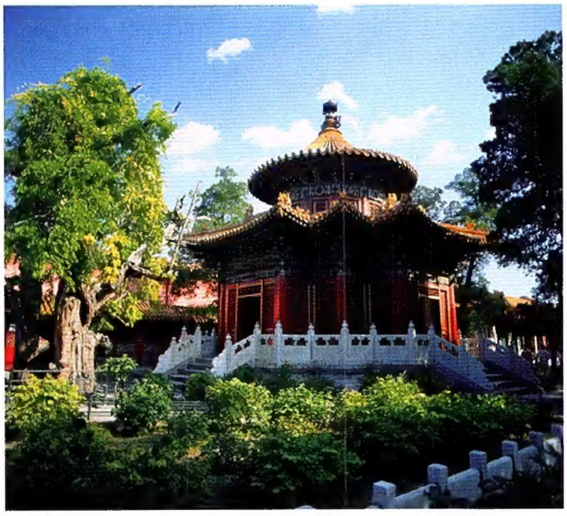
The Hall of Central Harmony is where emperors rehearsed for ceremonies and took short breaks before going into the Hall of Supreme Harmony. Behind it, the Hall of Preserving Harmony is where the emperor feasted the noble of ethnic groups on Lunar New Year's Eve.



2) Inner Court

Beyond the Hall of Preserving Harmony is the Inner Court, where the Hall of Heavenly Purity (Qianqinggong), Hall of Union (Jiaotaidian) and Palace of Earthly Tranquillity (Kunninggong) stand on the central axis and are flanked by six eastern and six western courtyards. These three halls are the main structures and they are smaller in size than the three halls in the Outer Court, although they look the same in style. The 12 courtyards are important complexes, for it was here that the imperial concubines resided.

The Inner Court is the area where the emperors lived and handled daily affairs. The first hall is the Hall of Heavenly Purity, which was originally the bedroom of emperors as well as their office. Some emperors also gave banquets here. In front of this hall are bronze tortoises and cranes, a grain measure and a sundial. Behind it is the smaller Hall of Union with its beautiful ceiling and clepsydra (water clock), where empress received greetings from others concubines. It was used to store the imperial seals of emperor and empress. The third hall on the central axis is the Palace of Earthly Tranquility, which was the empress' bedroom.



According to traditional Chinese beliefs, the Palace of Heavenly Purity represents heaven, the Palace of Earthly Tranquillity represents the earth and the Hall of Union represents their harmonious union.

North of the Inner Court is the Imperial Garden. Like all Chinese gardens, this relaxing part of the Forbidden City is a demonstration of an artificial scaled down universe with artificial mountain, rocks trees and flowers. The black bronze kettle in the middle is an oven for burning paper money and incense sticks for the ancestor veneration.

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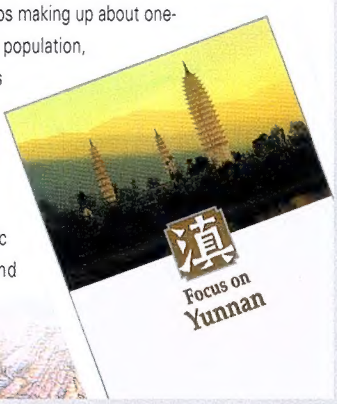
Focus on Yunnan

The mountainous wonderland of Yunnan enjoys a favourable warm climate year round. Its capital, Kunming, sitting alongside Yunnan's largest lake, Dianchi, has the honourable name of "Spring City". The province is full of natural wonders and cultural relics, such as the Stone Forests, the Shangri-La, and the ancient cities of Dali and Lijiang. With over 20 diverse ethnic groups making up about one-third of the population, opportunities abound for you to see their characteristic cultures and customs.



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Focus on Fujian

Situated on the southeast coast, Fujian Province overlooks Taiwan Island across the Taiwan Strait. Its mountainous landscape includes the Wuyi Mountain Scenic Area, one of the UN World Heritage sites in China. The province's zigzag coastlines, numerous beaches and charming seas offer spectacular scenic beauty as well as historical and cultural interest in such places as the Drumming Wave Islet in Xiamen and the Mazu Temple in Meizhou Island.

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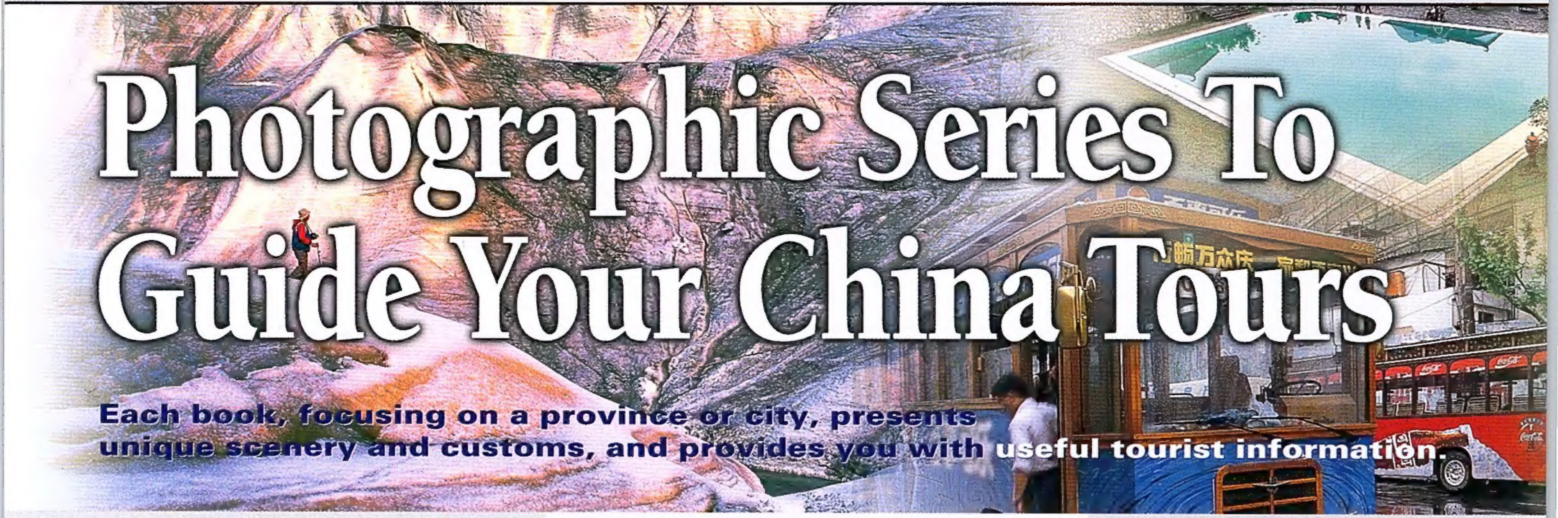
Focus on Shanghai

Shanghai, the largest metropolis in China, and formerly the Far East financial centre, has experienced dramatic development over the past century. The world-famous Bund along the Huangpu River shows you buildings of different historical periods and varied architectural styles, while skyscrapers are rising in the new area of Pudong. Shanghai's multiculturism is seen in its music — operas, nostalgic jazz and discos — and in the busy commercial district of Nanjing and Huaihai roads.



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Focus on Shaanxi

Shaanxi is the cradle of the Chinese civilisation and Xi'an was the capital of 13 dynasties. This has left Shaanxi a rich legacy of historical sites and cultural relics. In the provincial capital Xi'an, there is the fascinating terracotta army unearthed from the tomb of the First Emperor, Qin Shihuang; the tomb of Tang-dynasty Wu Zetian, China's first empress; and the stele forest. The province's beauty is capped with the sheer cliffs of Mount Huashan and the yellow earth of the Loess Plateau.

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Focus on Guangdong

An important gateway into China, the fertile Pearl River Delta of the southern province of Guangdong fans out from Guangzhou to the South China Sea and borders Hong Kong and Macao. The province's natural scenic spots include the limestone pinnacles of Zhaoqing's Seven Star Crags, the red sandstone of Danxia Mountain, and the volcanic beauty of Xiqiao Mountain. The capital, Guangzhou, offers plenty of history in its museums, temples, mosques and old colonial buildings.

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Focus on Guizhou

Guizhou is a land of splendid natural scenery. Its towering mountains and karst landforms team up with the gurgling rivers and magnificent waterfalls to form a wonderful work of Mother Nature. Huangguoshu Waterfalls and the limestone caves are the province's most frequented scenic spots. The 17 ethnic groups living in the picturesque province further colour the land with vivid customs and joyous festivals. It is its natural beauty and culture that make Guizhou a perfect travel destination.

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Focus on Tianjin

Tianjin, one of the four municipalities under direct Central Government administration, is an important industrial and commercial centre of China and the biggest port in the north. The history of the city can be found in its Ancient Culture Street, 100-year-old Western-style buildings, Opera Museum and Mazu Temple. Besides the TV Tower and the Haihe River in the city, there are scenic spots in the outskirts, including the Dule Temple and the Great Wall at Huangya Pass.

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Focus on Xinjiang

On the vast land of Xinjiang in Northwest China, there are mountains, basins, deserts and lakes, which provide tourists with numerous attractions — ruins of ancient cities and tombs along the Silk Road; Turpan, an oasis in the desert; Kanas Lake, a gem imbedded in the Altay Mountains; Bayanbulak — the Swan Lake; and the world's second largest desert, the Taklimakan. The minority ethnic groups living in Xinjiang, such as the Uygur, Kazak, Mongolian, Uzbek, Tajik, Xibe, Kirgiz and Tatar, all have their own unique colourful culture.

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Focus on Beijing

Beijing is a metropolis of everlasting charm. There are simply too many captivating things to see, to experience and to taste in this grand city with both old glamour and new mobility. There are historical sites such as the Palace Museum (the Forbidden City), the Temple of Heaven, the Summer Palace, and the Ming Tombs; there are also many scenic spots in its outskirts. Recently, tours have been organised for visitors to taste the real Beijing flavour of life — touring the small back lanes, having tea in a traditional-style teahouse and enjoying the Peking Opera.

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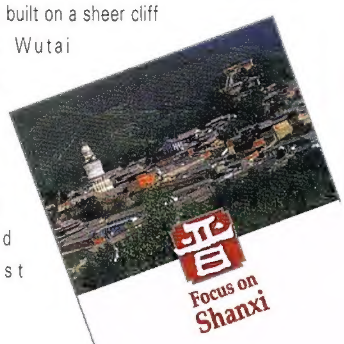
Focus on Shanxi

Shanxi Province, one of the birthplaces of the Chinese civilisation, has impressive ancient architecture and a wealth of well-preserved Buddhist temples, monasteries and grottoes. Among the most famous are the Yungang Grottoes containing some of China's oldest sculptures and Buddhist art, the Yongle Palace, the Jinci Temple, the Hanging Monastery built on a sheer cliff and the Wutai Mountain, one of China's most famous sacred Buddhist lands.



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Focus on Guangxi

Unusual topography has endowed the province with numerous spectacular karst formations — limestone caves, pinnacles and rocks. The most famous and enchanting scenic spot is Guilin, and the most travelled route, on the Lijiang River from Guilin to Yangshuo. The coastal city of Beihai has the country's largest beach, the Silver Beach. Other attractions include the varied traditional customs of ethnic minorities, the Sino-Vietnamese border area, and the mysterious Huashan cliff paintings.

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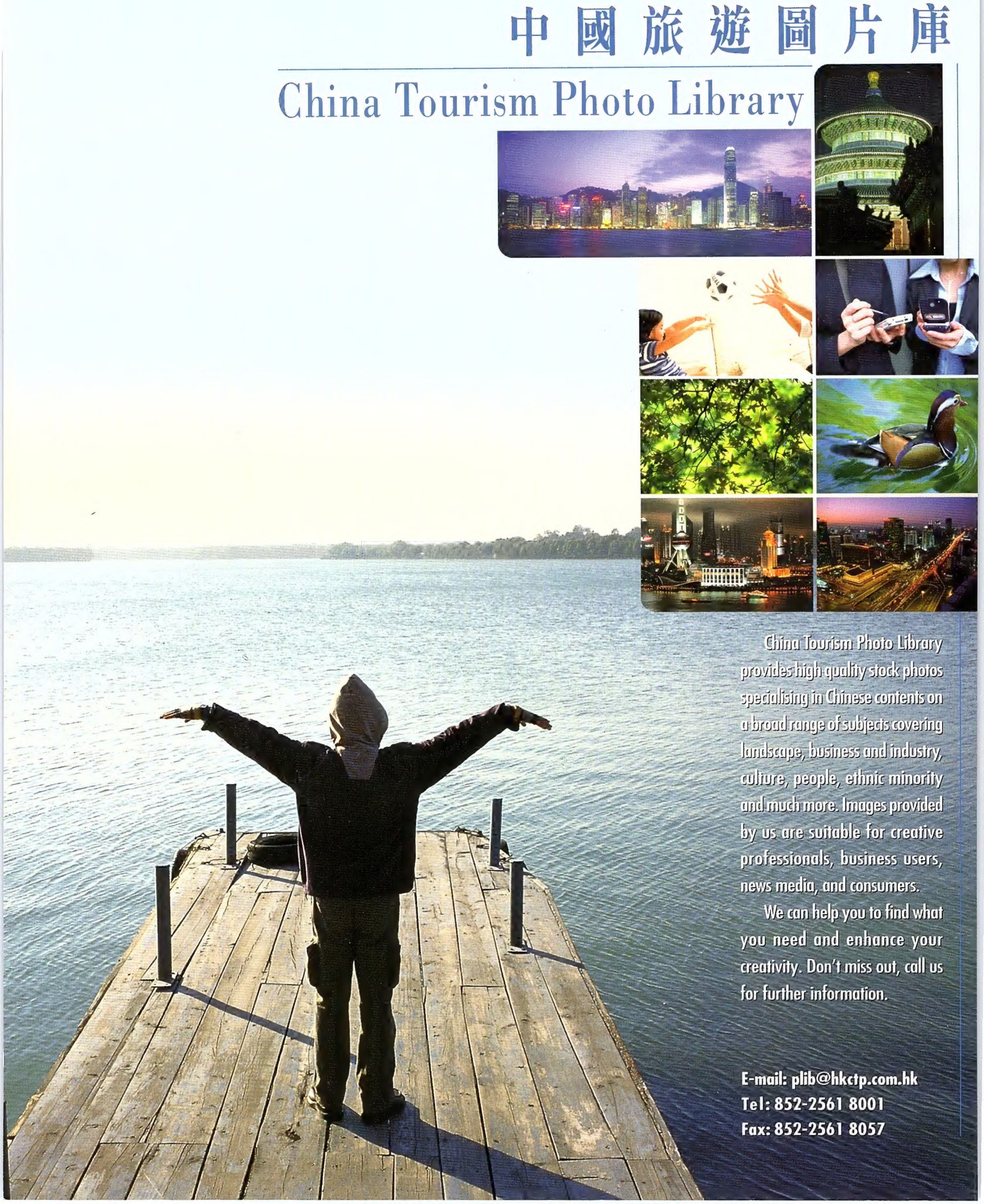

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